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The MOVING PICTURE BOYS AND THE FLOOD

BY
VICTOR APPLETON

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AS THE HOUSE DRIFTED DOWNSTREAM JOE GOT A SERIES OF MOVING PICTURES.

Moving Picture Boys and the Flood. —*Page* 97.

THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS AND THE FLOOD

OR

Perilous Days on the Mississippi

BY

VICTOR APPLETON

AUTHOR OF "THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS," "THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS IN EARTHQUAKE LAND," "TOM SWIFT AND HIS MOTOR CYCLE," "THE MOTION PICTURE CHUMS' FIRST VENTURE," ETC.

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BY VICTOR APPLETON

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The Moving Picture Boys and the Flood

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THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS AND THE FLOOD

CHAPTER I

A LONG-DISTANCE CALL

"Say, this looks bad, Joe! It sure does!"

"What's that, Blake? Must be quite serious, to make you sit up and take notice."

"It is! Look at the scare head!" and the speaker held out, for the inspection of his companion, a newspaper the front page of which fairly bristled with black type.

They were two youths, sitting under a cherry tree, on the green grass of a lawn which fronted a farmhouse. They were evidently taking their ease, or had been, for there were comfortable chairs near them, two hammocks, and a pile of magazines, while on a board seat, built into a crotch of the cherry tree, was a large pitcher of lemonade. And if that doesn't show comfort on a warm, sunny June day I don't know what does.

"Where'd you get that paper?" asked Joe Duncan, as he accepted the sheet his companion, Blake Stewart, passed over.

"It came in the mail, but I didn't take it out of the wrapper until a second ago. It's yesterday's. Some news that; eh?"

"It sure is," and as Joe began to read, Blake looked over his shoulder, murmuring such expressions as: "Worst flood in years! Many houses swept away! Toll of lives will be heavy! Many deeds of heroism! Mississippi on great rampage!"

What Blake gave expression to was merely quoted from some of the lines in the heading of the article that had so excited him and his chum. It was a telegraphed story of a big flood on the Mississippi, which, the article stated, was higher than it had been in years, while unusually heavy spring rains had added to the terrors of the rising waters.

"That sure is some flood!" murmured Joe, as he reached the bottom of the newspaper page, and turned the sheet over. "Hello!" he cried. "They've got some pictures of it, too!"

Almost all of the second page was taken up with half-tone cuts of scenes in the flooded districts. There were views of overturned houses being swept down a turbulent stream, pictures of half-demolished buildings, jammed together into

a rude sort of raft, on which could be seen farm animals; views of whole towns partly inundated, and people being taken from roofs and out of third-story windows in small boats. It was a photographic story of untold misery and desolation.

"Yes, sir, that sure is some flood, Blake," murmured Joe. "And do you know what I think?"

"I might make a guess at it, old man."

But Joe did not give his chum a chance. He went on hastily:

"I think we ought to go out there with our moving picture cameras, and get some films of that flood."

"I thought you were going to say that."

"Then you're not surprised. But how does it strike you?"

"Well, I sure would like to see the Mississippi on a tear the like of which she's having now, for it would be something worth remembering And I suppose we could make a neat little sum, over and above our expenses, if we went out there and got a lot of films. We could work them off through the moving picture newspaper syndicate easily enough. But you know why we came out here to Central Falls; don't you, Joe?" added Blake.

"To get a good rest in the country, of course."

"That's it, and we're getting it. There isn't anything I like better than this," and Blake, who had stretched out in lazy luxury on the grass, looked up at the blue sky, and into the cherry tree, which was laden with luscious fruit. "All I want now is a robin to come along, pick the cherries and drop them down to me," went on Blake, with a grin.

"Say, you don't want much," laughed Joe. "But it sure is nice here," and he looked across the fertile farm acres that stretched away to the rear, and on either side of the comfortable house, in the shade of which they were taking their ease.

"Finest place we could strike to spend a vacation," agreed Blake.

"But, all the same, I think we're missing a chance if we don't go out there and get some Mississippi flood pictures," went on Joe. "How does it strike you?"

"Say, I wish you hadn't mentioned it, Joe! Now you've got me going! If we hadn't seen a big story of it in the papers we'd be content to sit here, and take it easy. But, now that the germ has got to working——"

"Then you'll go there with me, and take our moving picture cameras along; won't you?" interrupted Joe, eagerly. "I tell you we may never have another chance like this!

"We've got pictures of earthquakes, of volcanoes in eruption, of wild animals fighting, and lots of other exciting things. But we never yet tackled a flood," went on Joe, with ever-growing enthusiasm. "And you know moving water always shows up well on the films."

"Oh, I can see what all this is leading to," broke in Blake. "Good-bye to all the fine, lazy times we've been having the last two weeks. No more lying in bed as long as you like—no more chicken dinners—we'll be lucky if we can hold a sandwich in one hand and grind away at the crank of the moving picture camera with the other. Good-bye to a good day's fishing in the brook. No more cherry pie, and no more lemonade in the shade. And, speaking of lemonade, we might as well finish this pitcher, and get ready to go. I can see what is going to happen," and he sighed in pretended dolefulness.

"Oh, don't go just because I suggested it, Blake," said Joe, quickly.

"Oh, no, I'm not blaming you. It's just that it's in our blood, I guess We can't seem to keep away from places where there are moving pictures to be made. Might as well get started. Here, have some," and he poured out a drink of lemonade.

"Oh, we'll have a good time, as well as some work, if we go out there," declared Joe. "It

won't be as bad as you try to make out. Didn't we always have good times on our trips?"

"Yes, and strenuous times, too. I'm not making any kick. Only if we hadn't seen that newspaper we could still be sitting here in the shade, eating cherries——"

Something fell with a thud on Blake's upturned face.

"Wow!" he cried. "I guess that robin's getting busy," for a ripe, luscious cherry had fallen from above, and Blake laughed as he popped it into his mouth.

"It's a good thing this isn't a cocoanut tree," remarked Joe. "You wouldn't feel so jolly if one of those hit you."

"I guess not. Well, I s'pose we might as well go in and tell Mr. Baker that we're going to leave him. We can pack up to-day, and start West to-morrow. We'll have to have the cameras sent on from New York. We can order them and a supply of film by telegraph. I guess we could telephone the message in. That will save a trip to town, and we haven't much time," added Joe.

"There you go! Off with a rush! Telephones and telegrams. Walking will be too slow for you! Everything bang-up! Let her go!" cried Blake, swinging his arms to indicate progress.

"Good-bye, vacation!" he cried. "The strenuous life from now on!"

The two youths arose from the grass, and together they started for the house at which they were boarding.

They had gone only a few steps, however, when, from across the country road, and a short distance down it, came a hail.

"Who's that?" asked Joe.

"I don't know—listen!" suggested Blake. "Are they calling us?"

There was no doubt about it a moment later, for the boys heard a voice shouting:

"Hi there! Joe! Blake! Moving Picture Boys! You're wanted!"

"Who is it? I can't see," murmured Joe.

"It's Harry, the clerk in Robertson's store," answered Blake, for a short distance away was the general store—"The Universal Emporium," as the sign had it—of Hank Robertson, of Central Falls.

"Come on, boys!" went on the voice of the caller, who was out of sight because of a roadside hedge. "You're wanted on the long-distance telephone!"

"Ugh!" groaned Blake. "Might have known it. Did you start this, Joe?" and he looked at his chum suspiciously.

"Don't know a thing about it. Who can want us on the 'phone?"

"Best way's to go and find out. Mighty queer, though, that just as we read of the Mississippi flood, and decide to go, someone should ring us up on long distance. I thought we got rid of all that when we came here for our vacation. Things have started with a rush."

"Say, are you comin'?" demanded the store clerk. "Central has been ringin' like all possessed! Must be important!"

"I guess it is, or they wouldn't telephone," murmured Blake.

"We're coming!" cried Joe.

Together the boys hurried out into the road, and turned down toward the store.

There were not many telephones in the country village of Central Falls. They were considered too much of a luxury. But Hank Robertson was rather progressive, and had had a long distance instrument installed in his store some time before.

"There you be, boys!" he said, as Joe and Blake entered. "I knew as soon as I heard the bell ring that it was long distance. I answered, and sent Harry out to call you."

"Much obliged," spoke Blake. "Do you know who it is?"

"Nope. It was Central talking. She said either of you two was wanted."

Blake stepped to the instrument, and took up the receiver, which had been standing upright on the desk.

"Hello!" he called into the transmitter. Then he was silent, but, from the look of wonder and surprise that spread over his face as he listened, Joe knew that it was something important, and out of the usual.

CHAPTER II

STIRRING NEWS

Joe could hear his chum Blake murmuring such things as:

"Yes, I'm listening! Is that so? Say, that's fierce!"

"Why, yes, I guess we can go," spoke Blake, after a lengthy talk from the person at the other end of the wire. "Yes, Joe's here with me," he went on. "What! Is she lost, too?"

"Say, for cats' sake give a fellow an idea what it's all about; can't you, Blake?" pleaded Joe, at his chum's elbow.

"Just a minute," answered Blake, in an aside. "I'll give you the whole story in a minute. I want to get it straight first."

Then he continued to listen, and while he is thus at the telephone I will tell my new readers, briefly, something about the moving picture boys.

In the initial volume of this series, entitled "The Moving Picture Boys; Or, Perils of a

Great City Depicted," I introduced Blake Stewart and Joe Duncan. They were farm lads, and, most unexpectedly, one day, a company of moving picture actors and actresses came to their village to make scenes in a rural drama. The two boys became interested, especially in the mechanical end of the work of making films.

Later they had an opportunity of taking up the business under the direction of Mr. Calvert Hadley, a moving picture operator, who offered to teach Joe and Blake how to properly use the wonderful cameras.

The boys went to New York, and met the members of the Film Theatrical Company, with which Mr. Hadley was associated. That gave Joe and Blake their start in life, and since then they had been in the business of taking moving pictures. They became experts, and their services were in great demand, not only in filming dramas acted by the company, but in making independent views.

They went out West, as told in the second volume, and got some stirring views of cowboys and Indians, and then they went to the Pacific Coast, and later to the jungle, where there were more strenuous times.

Their latest venture had been to Earthquake Land, and on returning from there they felt the

need of a vacation. They engaged board at the farmhouse of Hiram Baker, in Central Falls, about fifty miles from New York City, and they were taking their rest there when the newspaper story of the flood on the Mississippi, and the long-distance telephone call, rather interrupted their ease and quiet.

I might add that in their trip to the coast Joe located his long-lost father, and later, in an expedition to the jungle, he succeeded in locating his sister, who had gone to the Dark Continent as a missionary's helper.

Mr. Duncan and his daughter Jessie made their home together, and Joe stayed with them when he was not off with Blake making moving pictures—which was quite often.

For a time Joe and Blake had worked with the Film Theatrical Company, which went to various parts of the country to get the proper backgrounds for their films. But of late, as I have said, the two boys had started out for themselves.

Still they kept up their acquaintanceship and friendship with the company. Just a word about the various members, and I will resume this story.

Mr. Jacob Ringold was the proprietor of the Film Theatrical Company, and some of the members were Henry Robertson, who played juvenile

leads, Harris Levinberg, the "villain," Miss Nellie Shay, the leading lady, and Birdie Lee, a pretty, vivacious girl, who took the lighter feminine parts in the dramas. And there was Christopher Cutler Piper—oh, yes, we must not forget him.

Mr. Piper did not like his name—that is, the two first sections, and his friends, to oblige him, had shortened it to "C. C.," or else they called him just "Mr. Piper." Sometimes, however, he was referred to as "Gloomy."

This name fitted him to perfection. He was a gloomy comedian—that is, he was gloomy off the stage; not on it. He would raise a laugh by his action, or lines, and, coming out of the scene, would be in the most doleful state of mind imaginable.

In this book you will find many references to "filming" a scene, exposed, unexposed and developed films, cameras, and the like.

For a full explanation of how moving pictures are taken, I refer my readers to the previous volumes of this series.

And now to resume the story.

Blake stood there, his ear fairly glued to the receiver, and the expression on his face constantly changing. But, though it did change, a certain worried look, that came over it almost

from the first moment of the spoken words, did not leave it.

"Say, are you going to talk all day, without giving me a hint of what it is?" spoke Joe, in a tense whisper. "Let me listen in; can't you, old man?"

"Right away—yes," answered Blake, in an aside. "All right," he called into the transmitter. "Yes, I'll tell Joe all about it. He'll come with me, I'm sure."

"I rather guess I will—if I ever find out what it's about," murmured the other. "Have a heart, and tell me."

"Good-bye," called Blake, into the telephone. "I'll see you in New York."

Then he hung up the receiver, and, turning to his chum, asked:

"What do you think has happened?"

"I haven't the least idea, unless New York is wiped off the map by a dynamite explosion, and we're wanted to help put it back."

"No, it isn't exactly that," said Blake. "I was talking just now to Mr. Ringold. He's in a peck of trouble!"

"How's that?"

"Why, he wants us to start for the flooded Mississippi district at once, and get a lot of scenes out there. But that's not the worst. Part

of his company, that he sent out near Hannibal, Missouri, to take part in several film dramas, have been lost in the flood."

"Lost in the flood?" cried Joe. "His company of players?"

"Yes. He could give me no particulars, but he's going to start and organize a rescue party, and try to save them. He wants us to help with that work, as well as to make moving pictures for him. Some of the valuable films the company had already taken were also lost, when they were carried down the river."

"But how did it happen?" Joe wanted to know.

"He didn't have time to give me many particulars over the wire. He said he'd do that when he met us in New York."

"Some of our friends lost in the flood," murmured Joe. "I wonder if there's a chance of saving them?"

"We've got to try, anyhow," spoke Blake, seriously.

"Was C. C. among them?" Joe wanted to know, referring to the gloomy comedian.

"No, he's in New York, where Mr. Ringold also has a company at work for the movies. C. C. escaped. But Birdie Lee went adrift with the others."

"Birdie Lee!" cried Joe, for he and Blake were both very fond of the pretty, vivacious girl, whose pictures they had taken many times, as she went through her parts before the camera.

"I only hope we can rescue her," murmured Blake. "It certainly is a bad bit of news."

"And he didn't say how it happened?" inquired Joe.

"All he told me," resumed Blake, "was that the company was performing open-air stuff near the flooded district. How they happened to be carried away Mr. Ringold didn't know. It seems that someone telegraphed him the news, that's how he heard of it."

"And how did he happen to think of us, and how did he know we were here?"

"He says he thought of us at once—as soon as he got the news," went on Blake, "and he had our address. We left it with him when we came here, you know, but told him not to send for us except in case of emergency."

"And this sure is an emergency," cried Joe.

"You're right," agreed his chum. "Mr. Ringold got busy on the telephone, and—well, you know the rest. I told him we'd start for New York as soon as we could pack up. He'll meet us there, and then we'll head straight for the flooded district with our cameras."

"Busy times ahead," murmured Joe. "Well, I guess it's all for the best, except the carrying away of our friends. I was getting a bit tired of this vacation life, anyhow."

"So was I," admitted Blake, as they left the store and headed for their boarding house.

With quickening steps the boys walked up the path. There was nervous energy in their every move.

"My! But you're in a hurry on a hot day," observed Mrs. Baker, who had taken quite a liking to her two young boarders.

"Got to be!" exclaimed Blake. "We're going to try and catch the afternoon train for New York."

"New York! My sakes alive! You're not going; are you?"

"Got to," explained Joe. "I think we can make it if we hurry. Some friends of ours are lost in that Mississippi flood, and we've got to go and help find and save them if we can. No time to lose!"

"My land sakes! I never heard tell of such a thing!" cried Mrs. Baker. But the boys did not stop to hear her comments. They were on their way to their rooms to pack their grips.

CHAPTER III

MR. PIPER IS APPREHENSIVE

"WELL, it didn't take us long; did it, Blake?"

"No, indeed, Joe. But we certainly have hustled some since we got that long-distance telephone message."

"We're used to hustling, though, old man. You wouldn't get very far with moving pictures unless you did get a move on now and then."

The two chums were seated in a railway train, on their way to New York to meet Mr. Ringold, and do what they could to rescue the unfortunate members of the moving picture company. They did not know what was before them, but they had stout hearts, and they had made up their minds to brave any danger in order to save their friends.

"Poor Birdie Lee!" murmured Blake. "I can't help but think of her."

"Same here," agreed Joe. "She certainly was a dandy little chum and comrade. Always will-

ing to do anything that was asked, to make a good film."

"Yes, and she never found fault if someone made a break, and we had to film the scene all over again," put in Blake. "Do you remember the time she had to fall overboard, out of the boat on the lake?"

"I should say I did remember it! C. C. Piper was to rescue her, but he was so slow about it—so afraid he'd get drowned, or have wet feet, or something, that the scene was spoiled, and Birdie had to get into dry clothes, and act the whole thing over, taking a second plunge into the water."

"Mr. Ringold was sure mad at C. C. that day," laughed Blake. "But it didn't always happen that way. We've had our fun, too."

"Oh, sure. But we're not likely to this time—scooting around in the rain, on a river that's twice as big as it ought to be. Say, when we get to the junction we may be able to get a New York paper of to-day, and see how things are out in the flooded district now."

"Maybe we can," assented Blake.

The boys settled back in their seats, for the ride of about two hours to New York, for they were on a slow train. On receiving the news over the wire, they had hastily packed, and amid

the expressed regrets of Mr. and Mrs. Baker at their departure, had driven to the station.

Their train made a stop at nearly every depot, and at several, where there was a wait, Joe and Blake got out and inquired if there were any newspapers of that day. But none had been received.

"Cliff Junction!" called out the brakeman, and the boys prepared to change in order to take an express train for the remainder of the journey.

"Now for a paper!" exclaimed Blake, as he hurried up to the news-stand. Joe followed, and as a man, with his back turned to them, was making a purchase, they waited until he should have stepped aside.

"That's always the way!" this man was complaining in a voice at the sound of which Joe and Blake looked at each other quickly. "Always the way! Whenever I go anywhere the train is sure to be late."

"The express isn't much behind," said the boy at the news-stand. "Only ten minutes, and she'll make that up before she gets to New York."

"Ha! Yes. The engineer will put on extra steam, to make up lost time, and there'll be a collision, or we'll go off the track, or through a

bridge, or something like that," went on the man. "I never saw such a road, anyhow! I'll never travel on it again. I've had the worst luck to-day!

"Somebody stepped on my foot, the express-man didn't come for my baggage until I was nearly in a fit, for fear I'd miss the train, and now I get here and find the express late! What a world this is, anyhow! It's fierce."

"Hello, C. C.!" exclaimed Blake, heartily. He did not need to see the man's face to know who he was.

The complaining man wheeled about quickly.

"The moving picture boys!" he cried, as he noted Joe and Blake.

"That's who!" laughed Joe. "Where are you bound for?"

"New York; if I ever get there. But the train is late, and I know there'll be a smash-up!"

Then, having made this gloomy prediction, Mr. C. C. Piper whistled a merry little tune, and did a few dancing steps which he used in some of his comic scenes. C. C.'s gloom was evidently not deep.

"Oh, I guess we'll come out all right," said Joe, cheerfully. "But we heard that you were in New York."

"Who told you that?" demanded Mr. Piper.

"Mr. Ringold. I was talking to him over the long-distance 'phone a little while ago," explained Blake. "He said you were in New York."

"I was, but I ran up to see a friend, expecting to spend the week-end with him. And I'd no sooner gotten there than Ringold got me on the telephone, and ordered me back. That was after he talked to you, I guess. It seems some of his company are lost in the Mississippi flood, and he wants me to go out there with him. Some of the dramas will have to be done over again, as the films were lost, and he's going to try to find the missing folks."

"We're on the same errand," remarked Joe. "Mr. Ringold cut short our vacation, too, by long distance. We're in the same boat."

"Boat? Yes!" snorted the gloomy comedian. "And I guess we'll have to use a boat out on the Mississippi. We can't wade or swim, and there's sure to be a lot of trouble. I wish I'd never gone into this business! It's awful!"

"Oh, it may not be so bad," spoke Blake, cheerfully.

"It's bound to be," declared C. C. "Look at it! Bad luck from the very start. Express late, and all that. It's fierce!"

There was no use trying to talk him out of his gloom, and the boys realized this. It was

best to let him work it off in his own way, and be as cheerful as possible toward him.

"Is there any later news of the flood, in the paper?" asked Joe. "We only read of it in yesterday's sheet."

"Yes, it's getting worse instead of better," replied Mr. Piper. "I can't get my regular paper, though," he complained. "Why don't you keep the *Planet?*" he asked, of the boy behind the counter.

"I did have some, sir, but they're all gone," was the smiling answer.

"Ha! That's just the way! Everything goes wrong with me!" cried C. C. "I've a good notion to go back and not start until tomorrow. Something serious is bound to happen before this day is over. I've a notion to go back."

"Oh, I wouldn't," persuaded Blake. "Mr. Ringold will be expecting you, and he will be disappointed."

"Well, I'll go on; but, mark my words, something will happen before we reach New York," predicted C. C.

The moving picture boys purchased newspapers, not being particular what kind, as long as they contained fresh news of the big flood. They found more recent dispatches than those

they had read at the farmhouse, and other pictures. As Mr. Piper had said, the raging Mississippi was higher than before, and the almost constant fall of rain, augmenting the streams that poured into the Father of Waters, added to the danger and desolation.

"Anything about our friends?" asked Blake of his chum, as the latter scanned the pages eagerly.

"No, I don't see any mention of them. But it says several lives have been lost, and there is much suffering from lack of food and clothing."

"Too bad! I wish we were out there now, and could help."

The boys, pacing up and down the depot platform, rapidly glanced over the news sheets, and Joe suddenly uttered an exclamation.

"Here's something!" he cried. "There are no names given, but in a dispatch from Hannibal it says that it is rumored a company of moving picture actors, and actresses, were carried away in a house that was swept down by the current."

"That's our crowd, all right," declared Blake. "No mention of Birdie Lee; is there?"

"No, not any names given. Say, I wish that express would come along, and get us to New

York! I'm in a hurry to find out how much Mr. Ringold knows."

"So am I," added Blake.

"We'll never get to New York without an accident," declared the gloomy C. C. "I'm positive of it!"

However, at that moment the whistle of the approaching express train was heard, and there was a hurried movement among the waiting passengers. The moving picture boys and Mr. Piper kept together, and got seats by themselves.

"Well, we're making time now, all right," Joe said, as they whizzed along. "Making up some of those lost ten minutes."

"Um! Yes! Wait and see what happens," predicted C. C.

But nothing did, at least up to the time when the train pulled into the One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street station of the New York Central. The next stop would be the Grand Central Terminal, in the heart of New York.

"We've got a minute," remarked Joe, to his chum. "Let's see if we can get a still later paper. Maybe there's an extra out."

"I'm with you," agreed Blake, as they left the train. Mr. Piper seemed sad, that his apprehensions of an accident had not been borne out.

As Blake and Joe were looking for a newsboy,

they became aware of a commotion in the street below them, the tracks here being elevated. There was a clanging of bells, and much shouting.

"Something doing down there," remarked Blake.

"Yes, it's a fire!" cried Joe, as he caught a lurid reflection in the evening sky. "Looks like a big one, too. Shall we take it in?"

"Might as well. We can come down on a later train, and telephone Mr. Ringold. And say, you've got that little moving picture camera with you; haven't you?"

"Yes, I brought it along. Wasn't room to put it in the trunk."

"Then come on. We'll get some views of this fire. We can use them nicely, and it isn't likely that there'll be anyone else on the job. Come on and get the camera."

"We can't! The train's already started!" cried Joe, for the express was slowly moving.

"Yes, we can! I'll get it!" shouted Blake, as he sprang into the car where they had left their baggage. The train was now rapidly gathering headway, the whine and hum of the big motors of the electric engine mingling with the clang of the fire bells, and the shouts of the crowd in the streets below.

CHAPTER IV

OFF FOR THE FLOOD

"HERE, where are you going?" cried a station-attendant, as he saw Blake running to board the moving train.

"Forgot something—got to get it!" shouted the excited lad. Then, before the man could prevent him, Blake had jumped up the steps. Back he rushed to where his own and Joe's baggage had been left.

"Look after our stuff, C. C.!" he called to the startled comedian. "We're after a fire—moving picture. Tell Mr. Ringold we'll be down later this evening!"

Then, without giving Mr. Piper a chance to answer, Blake caught up the valise containing the small moving picture camera, and was out on the platform again.

"Look out for yourself!" cried Joe, for the train now had considerable headway.

"All right," answered his chum, and a moment later he was beside Joe, running from the momentum acquired in leaping off the train.

"You took a big risk, young fellow!" said one of the station men, severely.

"I'm used to that in my business," replied Blake, with a cool laugh. "Come on, Joe. We don't want to miss any of this fire. We can sell the film to one of the weekly newspapers, and make some of our vacation money."

"Go on! I'm with you!"

Together they made their way down to the street, and it needed but a glance to show them the extent of the blaze. The fire was in a large apartment house, and the flames had gained great headway. Thrilling rescue scenes were going on, and, from some of the upper stories, men and women were dropping into the life nets, about which, in a circle, stood the sturdy firemen, and volunteer helpers.

"Got to get this!" cried Blake. "Is there plenty of film in her, Joe?"

"I think so. But I'll get more. There's a photo-supply house about three blocks away. You start grinding away at the crank, and I'll chase down there and get another reel of film in case we want it. I guess they'll be open yet."

"All right," answered Blake, with a nod. Then he looked for a vantage point from which to make pictures of the big fire.

He decided to stand on a square pillar, near the steps of a building nearly opposite the burning structure, and, slipping under the rope which the police had stretched as the limits of the fire lines, Blake was about to set up his machine, when a man, also bearing a moving picture camera, made for the same place. It was really about the only spot where a good picture could be taken, but there was room for only one operator there.

The opposite pillar, or pedestal, was occupied by a portable searchlight, operated by some firemen, to aid their comrades in the work of rescue and fighting the flames, and the brilliant, white light being flashed on the burning structure made it possible to get a good moving picture film. So Blake was anxious to reach this place of vantage.

He was about to start his machine, when the man, who had reached the spot just too late, cried:

"Say, kid, come down out of there! That's my place!"

"Yours?" cried Blake, as he noted that the man was James Munson, a rival moving picture operator, and one with whom Blake and Joe had had trouble before.

"Yes, mine!" sneered Munson. "I was here

a minute ago, and decided on that place, and now I want it."

"Well, you're not going to get it!" declared Blake, firmly. "If you were here you should have stayed," and the young operator started the mechanism of his apparatus, by turning the handle.

"I had to leave, to get some extra film!" Munson cried. "I want you to come away—come down and let me get up there!"

"Nothing doing," spoke Blake. "You should have left your machine here, to show that the pedestal was occupied. I don't believe you were here, and as I'm here first I'm going to stay!"

"Oh, you are; eh? We'll see about that!" cried Munson, as he worked his way through the crowd, carrying his camera with him.

Blake thought little more about the fellow, for he was too much occupied in getting views of the burning building, and the thrilling rescues that were made from time to time. Firemen went rapidly up, from window to window, by means of the hooked scaling ladders, leaping into the burning building in search of persons in danger.

Other firemen carried down unconscious forms, and still others were engaged in the less

spectacular work of handling the hose, with its powerful streams of water.

All these scenes Blake was getting on the sensitive celluloid film, and he was congratulating himself on his success, when a voice in authority called to him:

"Say, young fellow, have you got a fire badge, or permit?"

"Why, no," answered Blake, slowly, as he continued to grind away at the crank. "I left it home, I guess." He and Joe both had permits, entitling them to go within the fire lines, but they had not taken them away on their vacation.

"You'll have to come down out of that," went on the voice of the policeman who had challenged Blake. And the youth, looking down, saw, beside the guardian of the peace, the mean, sneering face of Munson. It was he, evidently, who had suggested to the police officer that he oust Blake from his place.

"Can't you overlook it this once?" asked Blake, eagerly, for the fire was getting worse now, and he knew it would show up well on the films. If he had to leave his place he could not get another as good, and would miss some thrilling scenes.

"Come on down!" ordered the officer. "You can't stay there without a badge, or a permit, and and you haven't got either. Get down, I tell you!"

"Hold on, Flarity," spoke a new voice. "I'll lend him my badge. You know me; don't you?" and there stepped forward a young fellow whom Blake recognized as a newspaper reporter, to whom he had often given pictures of accidents, for the journal he represented.

"Well, Kennedy, if you let him take your badge, I guess it will be all right," said the officer to the reporter.

"Say, that's mighty good of you!" cried Blake, as the newspaper man passed up the metal badge that entitled the wearer to go within the fire lines, "but what will you do?"

"Oh, I guess Flarity won't put me out," said the reporter, with a laugh. "If he does, I know something about him——"

"Get on with you!" interrupted the officer, hastily, and with a rather embarrassed smile. "I'll look the other way, Kennedy."

"I thought you would," laughed the reporter. "Now you're all right, Blake," and he nodded, in a friendly fashion, at the moving picture boy.

Munson's plan had failed, and he moved away to look for another place whence he could film

the fire. He cast an ugly look at Blake as he went, though, and muttered to himself.

"I'm sorry I had to do this," thought Blake, "but I wasn't going to pass up a chance like this. Munson may make trouble for us, though. He's got a revengeful disposition. But if Joe and I go out to the flooded district probably we shan't see him for some time."

If Blake had really known the depth of the resentment Munson cherished against him, from that moment, he might have given in to the fellow. Had he done so it would have saved much trouble for himself and Joe later. But he could not foretell the future.

Blake continued to take pictures of the fire, and he was beginning to think his film would run out, when Joe came up with a fresh reel. The policeman had gone away, and there was now so much excitement about the fire that no one minded whether Joe had a badge or not. He relieved Blake at the camera.

But the blaze, big as it was, finally yielded to the work of the firemen, and at length all the persons had been gotten out of the apartment

"I guess we've got enough," said Blake, finally. "Now we'll hustle this to the laboratory, Joe, have it developed, and see what use we can make of it. I'll get some of the weeklies

on the 'phone, and see how many prints they want."

Blake and Joe, as those of you know who have read the other books of this series, had their own establishment in New York, where they developed and printed their films.

What Blake meant by "weeklies" was a certain feature much used in moving picture houses. Important current events of the week, big accidents, volcanic eruptions, war scenes—in fact, anything in which the public is interested—are registered on the sensitive celluloid, and sent around to the theaters which take the service of the weekly film. It is, in brief, a moving picture newspaper, and our two heroes had made considerable money in the past in supplying films for this purpose.

A little later the film of the fire was being developed, ready for printing, and Blake had secured, over the telephone, a number of orders. These were turned over to their assistants, for the two youths could not do all the work themselves, and had a number of employes.

"Well, now that's done," said Joe, with a sigh of satisfaction. "We'd better be getting down to see Mr. Ringold, I guess."

"Yes," agreed Blake, looking at his watch. "And I want something to eat, too. It's past

ten o'clock, and we haven't had supper yet."

"That's right!" cried Joe. "I forgot all about it."

"My stomach didn't," laughed Blake.

An hour later, after a hasty meal, they reached the office of Mr. Ringold, whom they found talking to Mr. Piper.

"I was just going to telephone around, and get the police on your trail," said the gloomy comedian. "I was afraid something had happened to you. Did there?"

"Oh, nothing much," spoke Joe, with a smile. "But what is the news, Mr. Ringold? Have you heard any word from any of your people in the flooded district?"

"No, I haven't, I'm sorry to say, though I've tried all the means in my power. It is almost impossible to get messages through, and receive a reply. The wires are nearly all down. The only way is for us to go out there. I'm glad you boys came on."

"We started as soon as we could," explained Blake. "I guess Mr. Piper told you how we stopped to film the fire; didn't he?"

"Yes," replied the film theatrical manager. "And now, how soon can you start for the flooded district?"

"Just as soon as we can get our cameras

ready, and provide for a supply of film—in the morning," answered Joe.

"Good! Then we'll start. We've got hard work and some danger ahead of us."

"We're used to that—especially the danger," remarked Joe. "I guess it won't be much worse than it was in earthquake land."

"I should hope not!" murmured Mr. Piper. "I don't like this idea at all. I'm sure something is going to happen!"

"You're nervous!" cried Mr. Ringold, "and I don't blame you, either. This news has gotten on my nerves. When I think of how my friends may be suffering, it makes me wild to get out there, and help them."

"Same here!" exclaimed Blake, and I think he and Joe had a similar thought then, and the same memory of a pretty, blue-eyed girl—Birdie Lee.

The two moving picture boys spent several hours getting their cameras and equipment ready for the start the next morning, and when they tumbled into bed they "didn't need to be sung to sleep," as Blake put it.

As several of the completed films of the Western dramas had been lost in the flood, Mr. Ringold decided to have others made, and to accomplish this he would have to hire more players.

But he thought he could engage them in the West, and so, save for a few leading characters, like Mr. Piper, he took only a few actors and actresses with him.

"We'll, we're off," murmured Joe, as, the next day, he and Blake took their places in the train that was to bear them to the West, and the flood.

"Yes, we're off, and there's no telling what may happen before we get back," answered his chum, seriously.

CHAPTER V

THE RELIEF TRAIN

"WHAT are your plans, Mr. Ringold?" asked Blake, as he and his chum, with C. C., sat in the Pullman car, talking over the situation.

"I really haven't had time to make any very definite ones," answered the manager. "I'm taking out a supply of money, I don't mind saying that," he went on, and Mr. Piper suddenly gave a quick look about the coach, and uttered a stagy hiss, as a caution to be silent.

"What's up now?" asked Joe.

"I don't think it's wise to speak so plainly about money," replied the gloomy comedian. "You might be robbed, Mr. Ringold."

"Did you see any suspicious characters following us?" the manager wanted to know.

"Well, I wouldn't say they were exactly suspicious," went on the actor, "but I did see two men hanging around us when we were having our baggage checked in the depot. They seemed

very anxious to know where we were going."

"Is that so?" asked Mr. Ringold, and he seemed unusually interested. "What sort of looking chaps were they?"

The actor described them. Blake and Joe looked at each other quickly.

"I don't seem to recognize them as friends of mine," went on the manager, musingly.

"I should say not!" cried Blake. "Certainly not friends! Say, I'm sure those men were James Munson, and one of his tools, Jake Black. They made a lot of trouble for us, and at the fire, last night, Munson and I had an argument. Do you think they can be following us?"

"It's just as well to be on the safe side," said Mr. Ringold. "Suppose you boys take a look through the train, and see if you can pick them out. I don't like the idea of being followed by a rival moving picture man, when I may have a chance to get some exclusive, and valuable films."

Blake and Joe each went through half the train, but they saw no signs of Munson, or his crony. The boys even penetrated to the smoking car, where the two suspects would probably stay, but they were not there.

"False alarm, I guess," reported Blake, when he and Joe had completed their search.

"Well, they were hanging around, all right,"

declared the sad actor, "though they may not be here now. But, just the same, I wouldn't mention about having so much money—not in public. Something might happen, Mr. Ringold."

"I think there is little danger. I have only a small part of it in cash. The rest is in letters of credit, that are only good when I have signed them. I'm not worrying.

"But as to plans. The only thing I see to do is to go direct to Hannibal, and see if we can get on the trail of the missing ones there."

"That does seem to be about the only thing to do," agreed Blake. "I wish we were there now. It's maddening to know you've got a lot to do, and not be able to do it. I want action!"

"And so do I!" cried his chum.

However, there was nothing for it but to wait until they reached the flooded district. On and on sped their train, making but few stops. When they did reach a large city, the boys would go out and buy the latest papers, to get news of the flood along the Mississippi.

The reports were not reassuring. The rains still continued at intervals, and the rivers, not only the Mississippi, but tributary streams also, were rising, which added to the swollen condition of the big waterway.

Pitiful tales of suffering of men, women and

children began to filter in, and it was reported that relief measures were being undertaken by the various states. In some places the National Guard was being ordered out, to aid in rescue work, and several detachments of the Regulars had been sent to the flooded districts.

The first day and night passed without incident to our friends speeding to the West. No trace was seen of Munson, or any of his tools, and it was certain that if he had not boarded the train in New York, at which station the actor said he had seen him, the rival was behind, and not ahead of our friends.

"What's the matter, Blake?" asked Mr. Ringold, on the second day out. "Are you restless?" for the youth was pacing up and down the aisle of the car.

"Yes, I am, Mr. Ringold," he answered. "I wish I had something to film. I'm tired sitting around."

"You didn't mind it when we were out in the country," remarked Joe.

"No, but then we were on a vacation, and we were entitled to a rest. But now we're back on the job again, and I want action. I almost wish something would happen, to give me a chance to make a film."

"Don't say that! Don't say that!" cried Mr.

Piper, with upraised hand. "Don't wish for anything to happen, or it may. This train is going very fast, and there may be a smash-up any minute."

Hardly had he spoken, than there sounded the sudden application of the air brakes. The wheels groaned and whined under the pressure, and the train came to a quick stop.

"There!" cried the gloomy comedian. "What did I tell you? That's what you get for wishing for an accident!"

"I didn't wish for one," replied Blake, quickly, as he reached for the carrier containing his moving picture camera, "and I don't believe it is an accident. Anyhow, nothing has happened to us," he added. "But I'm going to see what it is. Come on, Joe."

The two boys, as well as Mr. Ringold, the actor, and several other passengers, hurried from the car, as the train had now come to a full stop. And what Blake and Joe saw was a danger signal set against the train, on the approach to a long bridge that spanned a turbulent stream.

"What's the matter?" asked Joe, of a trainman.

"Bridge is weakened by high water," was the answer. "The bridge-tender must have discovered it suddenly, for he flashed down the signal

against us in a hurry. The engineer had to put on the emergency air, in order to stop in time."

They all walked forward along the track to the first span of the bridge. It looked to be all right, but the rushing, muddy water that flowed beneath it was close to the ties and rails.

"I think one of the piers is weakened a little," said the bridge-tender. "And if the water rises much more she'll tear away, sure. I've sent for the repair gang. They're only five miles away, and they may be able to brace it temporarily."

"Then we'll be delayed?" asked Mr. Ringold.

"I'm afraid so," answered the conductor. "I can't take any chances with this train on a weak bridge."

Of course he was right, but everyone fretted over the delay, especially our friends, who wanted to start their rescue work.

"We'll, I've got something to film, anyhow!" cried Blake. "I'll make pictures showing the repairs to the bridge."

The construction and wrecking crews were soon on hand, and a careful examination disclosed the fact that the bridge had been slightly weakened.

"But we can brace her temporarily—that is, unless the water rises suddenly," said the foreman.

"Our first taste of the flood," murmured Blake, as he and Joe set up the camera to make moving pictures.

The boys were much interested in the work of strengthening the bridge, and got some good views of it. The work took several hours, but was finally completed enough for the train to proceed slowly—in two sections.

The locomotive took over part of the cars, shunted them to a switch, and then pulled over the remainder. The train was then made up again, and proceeded. But considerable time had been lost.

The night passed without incident, and on arriving at the junction point, a large city, where they were to change trains, the boys found a further chance to make films.

"What's going on?" asked Blake, as he saw, in the depot, a number of soldiers boarding the cars. Boxes, bales and barrels were also being rushed into baggage and express cars.

"One of the relief trains, for the flood victims," said a depot attendant. "They're rushing food and supplies to the homeless ones, and the soldiers are going to help in the rescue work."

"More pictures, Joe!" cried Blake. "We've got time before our train leaves to make a short film of this rescue train."

CHAPTER VI

THE MISSING FILMS

LIVELY and varied were the scenes about the relief train. Wagons were constantly being driven up to the station, loaded with supplies that had been contributed by generous merchants, or bought with public subscriptions.

The soldiers wore serious faces, for it was reported, in a few of the large cities, that rioting and robbery had followed the trail of the flood.

"Well, I'd just like to get my hands on some of those human fiends who'll rob at a time like this!" exclaimed a big trooper, as he banged his gun down on the platform. "I'd show him what's what!"

"That's right!" chimed in his comrades.

More soldiers kept arriving. They were mostly National Guardsmen, though one company of Regulars was on the train.

Some doctors were being taken along, and a quantity of medical stores, for sickness had

broken out, it was reported. A large supply of tents was being shipped, for many of the sufferers had been driven from home by high water, had been forced to flee to the hills, where they were camping in the open. And tents were much needed for shelter, for, though it was Summer, there was considerable rain, and this made it very uncomfortable for the refugees, especially the women and children, to stay out unprotected.

All these scenes Joe and Blake took with their moving picture camera. Now and then they moved up or down the big depot, to get varied views. Sometimes they would film a pathetic scene, as when a little girl, who had evidently read about the relief subscriptions, brought her bank filled with pennies.

"Here, Mr. Soldier-man," she said, to a bearded Regular. "I've got a dollar an' nineteen cents saved up, and I want you to take it and buy some little girl a pair of rubber boots, so she can wade in the water, and not get drowned."

"All right," cried the soldier, as he wiped away something that glistened in his eyes, and blew his nose unnecessarily hard, it seemed. "All right, little one. I'll take care of your money for you."

"And don't forget to buy the boots!" cried the tot, shaking her finger at him to impress it on his mind.

"I won't," he promised, and as he stood looking at the penny-bank, rather uncertain what to do with it, Blake filmed him, as a conclusion of the little scene.

"I wonder if I oughn't to make the kid take back this money?" the soldier said, speaking to the boys. "Maybe her folks wouldn't like her to give it away."

"I guess they wouldn't mind," remarked Blake, with a smile. "Anyhow, she's gone now," for she had quickly slipped away in the throng.

"But what am I to do with the stuff?" asked the bewildered trooper.

"Turn it over to some of the ladies," suggested Joe, for a committee of Red Cross women were to go with the relief train.

"I guess I will," the man said, with an air of relief.

There was a dog who refused to be separated from his soldier-master, and every time the animal was put out of the depot it came rushing back again, determined to board the train. The boys got a picture of this odd little scene, and finally the dog had to be given in charge of a

porter, to be led away at the end of a rope, howling his protest at the separation.

"Good work, boys!" complimented Mr. Ringold, when he saw what they were doing. "I'll use some of these films as part of one of the flood dramas, if we're lucky enough to be able to get other scenes."

"Oh, we'll get some!" declared Blake, confidently.

"That ought to be a fine one," went on the manager, referring to the relief train scene. "Take good care of that film, boys."

It was placed in a metal light-tight box, to be developed later, as was the film of repairing the bridge. Blake and Joe intended leaving them at an agency they knew of, farther West, there to be developed, and printed.

"All aboard!" called the conductor of the relief train, and there was the last scurrying and hurrying to finish up the work. This train pulled out ahead of the one the boys and their friends were to take, and it had the right of way, for help was now urgently needed in the flooded district.

Progress from then on, for those who were seeking the lost actors and actresses, was rather slow and uncertain. They were now on the edge of the flooded district, and, though they saw no

scenes of actual suffering, as yet, they were held up by such happenings as bridges washed away, or made unsafe, tracks undermined by the rain, and landslides covering the rails.

So they were two days longer on the road than otherwise they would have been. Relief trains, too, had the right of way, and even the regular passenger trains were held back, or switched to other tracks, while the cars laden with soldiers and supplies were rushed forward.

Mr. Ringold fretted and fumed at the delay, but there was no help for it. Those suffering must be cared for first.

"We ought to be at Hannibal to-morrow," said the manager, one night, as the sleeping berths were being made up. "Then we can start in, and do something. I only hope we can find them," he added, referring to his lost company.

Joe and Blake had sections opposite each other, and, after talking across the aisle in low tones for a few minutes, they dropped off to sleep.

It was past midnight when Blake thought he felt someone fumbling at the curtains of his berth.

"That you, Joe?" he asked, sleepily.

"What's that?" inquired his chum, evidently also just awakened.

"I asked if that was you at my berth just now," repeated Blake. "I'm sure I felt someone."

"So did I. I thought it was you," said Joe. "Were you up?"

"Not a bit of it! Say, maybe we'd better look around a bit. The films are under my berth."

Blake slipped on a bathrobe over his pajamas, and got out in the aisle. The narrow, curtained passage contained no one. Joe thrust his head out between his curtains, to watch Blake as he felt under the berth.

"Joe, they're gone!" cried the young operator, as he faced about. "The cases containing the relief train and bridge films are gone!"

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. I left them right between my two valises, and they're not there now."

"Maybe the porter took them by mistake," suggested Joe.

"I'll ring and find out," declared Blake, as he pushed the button in his berth.

A sleepy colored man shuffled out from the end of the car.

"'Ju ring, sah?" he yawned.

"Yes," exclaimed Blake. "Did you take anything from under my berth?"

"Yais, sah. Ah done tuck yo' all shoes jest now, fo' to shine 'em. I allers does dat 'long 'bout dish yeah time. I done tuck dat gen'man's shoes, too," and he nodded at Joe.

"Did you just take them?" Blake wanted to know.

"Yais, sah. 'Long 'bout two er free minutes ago. Didn't yo' all want me to?"

"Oh, that's all right," said Blake, as a puzzled look came over his face. "Then it was you who woke me up—taking my shoes?"

"Ah's mighty sorry, sah," spoke the porter, as he saw a vanishing vision of a tip. "Ah didn't go fo' t' do it, sah!"

"I don't mind about that," said Blake, "but there are some films missing from under my berth. Did you see, or take them?"

"'Deed an' Ah didn't, boss!" was the quick reply. "Ah ain't got no use fo' movin' picture films, 'deed an' Ah ain't!"

The man was evidently honest.

"Then they must have been taken earlier in the night," said Blake, slowly.

"By whom?" asked Joe.

"There's only one person I suspect—Munson. He must be on our trail, and that means trouble, Joe," spoke Blake, soberly.

CHAPTER VII

STALLED

"WHAT'S going on?" asked Mr. Ringold, who had been awakened in his berth, near the two boys, by hearing the talk. "Has any thing happened?"

"There certainly has," replied Blake, taking care not to speak too loudly, for fear of awakening the other passengers. "Our undeveloped films have been stolen—the ones showing the relief train, and the bridge work."

"Stolen!" exclaimed the manager, thrusting his head out from between the curtains.

"Well, they're gone, and that's the only way I can account for it," went on Blake, as he told the story, the colored porter standing by, and listening with open mouth.

"We haven't made any stops since you put the films under your berth; have we?" asked Mr. Ringold.

"No, sah, dish yeah train ain't done made no stops since dark," answered the porter.

"Then the thief must be aboard still!" cried

the manager. "We must find him. It's probably Munson, just as you suspect. Wait until I get some clothes on, and we'll search."

It was not an easy matter to look for Munson aboard a train consisting mostly of sleeping cars, the occupants of which had, in the main, retired. But when the urgency of the matter was explained to the conductor, he lent his aid, and by questioning the porters and brakemen, and such passengers as were aroused, it was learned that no one answering Munson's description had been seen.

"Of course it may not have been he," said Blake, when the fruitless search was over, "and, if it was, he may have jumped from the train."

"He could have done that," the conductor admitted. "We struck a pretty stiff grade not long ago and had to reduce speed. He could have jumped off, if he hit the right place, with little chance of injury."

Nothing more could be done, and, regretting the loss of the valuable films, Blake, Joe and the others returned to their berths.

"I'll wire all the agencies and warn them against buying those films," said Mr. Ringold. "That may help some. And I'll get a detective agency after Munson. Those pictures are too valuable to lose."

Breakfast was eaten aboard the train just before coming into Hannibal, and at the first stop Ringold sent off his telegrams. A more complete search of the train, by daylight, failed to disclose Munson, or any suspicious characters whom he might have engaged to trail our friends, and steal from them.

"Well, we'll be there soon, now," Joe said, as he rose from the table in the dining car. "We'd better get our things together, Blake."

"That's right. Say, it's raining again!"

"So it is!" agreed Joe, looking out of the car window. "This is fierce! Isn't it ever going to let up?"

It had rained at intervals for the last two days, and that fact, coupled with the knowledge that it had been pouring more or less steadily before that, did not give much assurance that the flood would soon abate.

"The Mississippi will be higher than ever," murmured Blake. "It's going to make it bad all around—bad for us and bad for those who are lost. We'll have hard work finding them."

"We'll never find them," broke in the gloomy voice of C. C. Piper. "They are gone forever."

The faces of Blake and Joe, no less than that of Mr. Ringold, were grave. There were grown men and women in the party of players reported

as being lost, but the two boys thought most of Miss Birdie Lee. It was almost as though their own sister were lost, so near and dear did they feel toward the little actress.

Rain, rain, and still more rain! The big drops splashed on the car windows, and on either side of the track were to be seen wet and sodden fields, many of them almost out of sight under sheets of water. They passed through miles of dripping forest, to come out perhaps near the bank of some stream that was filled to overflowing. Once the tracks were partly under water, at a point where a small river had overflowed the banks, and the engineer had to slow down for fear of spreading rails.

It was a dreary outlook, and when they stopped at a station where they could get newspapers, the printed reports of the flood were most alarming.

"Isn't it ever going to let up raining?" asked Blake, as he wiped the moisture from a window and looked out for a possible sign of a break in the clouds.

"It'll rain for forty days—or longer," said Christopher Cutler Piper, in still more gloomy tones.

A passenger in the seat ahead of the comedian turned around, gave one look at the actor, and

then, taking a bottle from his valise gravely offered it to C. C.

"Here," he said, "take some of this. It will do you good."

"Hey! What is it?" asked the comedian, suspiciously.

"Liver medicine," went on the passenger, who looked as though he might be a country doctor. "I know what's the matter with you. You've got liver complaint. I've had it, and I know just how mean it makes you feel."

"But there's nothing the matter with my liver!" protested the actor. "Nothing at all!"

"Don't tell me! I know better!" declared the other, with emphasis. "I put this medicine up myself, and it's the greatest liver regulator and revivifier in the world. One dose will make you feel like a new man, and two will almost cure you. I won't charge you anything for it, either. I hate to see anyone suffer as you do."

"But I don't suffer," cried Mr. Piper, at a loss to understand the other's queer action. The actor looked around as though for help, in case the man should become violent.

"You don't suffer!" the country doctor cried. "Why, you have the worst complaint in the world. You're a pessimist!"

"Huh!" grunted C. C.

"You're always looking on the dark side of things," went on the doctor, "and that shows your liver is affected. One bottle of my celebrated revivifier will make you look at things through rose-colored spectacles. Don't take my word for it, though. Take the medicine."

"All right," agreed Mr. Piper, while the boys and Mr. Ringold smiled in appreciation of the joke. "I'll take some later," and he laid the bottle aside. The doctor turned away, apparantly satisfied, and a little later Mr. Piper began telling to Joe and Blake one of the many humorous stories for which he had been famous while on the vaudeville stage, before taking up moving picture work.

He brought the tale to an end, amid laughter from the boys, and the doctor, hearing, turned around.

"That's more like it," he said, casting a glance of approval at C. C. Piper. "I knew you'd feel happier after one dose of my liver revivifier."

"But I didn't take it!" said the actor. "Though I'm going to!" he added quickly, as he noted the look on the other's face. "I'm sure it's good," he said, and then, when Blake told the medical man that it was only C. C. Piper's invariable habit to look on the gloomy side, even while cracking a joke, the patentee of

the revivifier shook his head in a puzzled fashion.

"Queerest case I ever heard of," he said. He went several seats up in the car after that, as though he were afraid C. C. might, in a fit of sudden despair, do him some injury.

This little incident served to somewhat enliven a day that had begun gloomily enough, and which seemed as though it would continue so, for the rain showed no signs of stopping.

"It's lucky we brought along rubber boots and our rain-coats," remarked Blake, as he and Joe were gathering their baggage and cameras together, preparatory to leaving the train, which would soon arrive in Hannibal.

"Yes, we'll need 'em all right," agreed his chum. "And say, we're going to have trouble getting pictures if this downpour keeps up. We'll get nothing but blurs on the films."

"Oh, it's bound to let up some time," spoke Blake, hopefully.

The train had been proceeding slowly for some time now. The tracks ran along the river, occasional glimpses of which could be had.

"Look at that!" suddenly cried Joe, as the train rounded a curve, giving the best view yet had, of the flooded Mississippi. "Say, that's some water, all right!"

"I should say yes!" exclaimed Blake.

The boys looked out on a big stretch of muddy water, in which numerous trees, and other debris, could be seen floating. The current seemed sluggish enough, though doubtless it moved with considerable power. Now and then small buildings could be noted in the yellow water, having been carried down from some farms further up stream.

"There goes a house!" exclaimed Mr. Ringold, who was at the adjoining window. "Say boys, this surely is serious!"

The house, a small one, was turning slowly about in the current.

"Say, I wish we could get some pictures," murmured Blake.

"You'll have enough chance to get them later," spoke a brakeman, going through the car. "You haven't begun to see things yet!"

"Are they very bad?" asked Joe.

"I should say so! I doubt if we can get in. The river has gone up two feet since yesterday, and it's still rising."

"You mean we won't get into Hannibal?" asked Blake.

"That's about it. I don't see how we're going on much farther. The track just ahead of us was on the edge of the water last night, so I heard, and it's bound to be covered now. There are a

couple of bridges, too, that were in danger of being washed away."

"I knew it! I knew something would happen!" cried Mr. Piper.

"Say, hadn't you better take some of that liver regulator?" asked Mr. Ringold, with a smile at the comedian.

The train, which had been proceeding more and more slowly, now came to a stop. The passengers glanced uneasily about, and Joe and Blake hurried out.

"Any accident?" Joe asked, of the brakeman who had spoken of the flood.

"No; at least not to the train. We're stuck, that's all."

"Stuck?"

"Yes, stalled! We can't go any farther." He pointed ahead, to where the line swept around a curve, and at the bend stood a man with a red flag.

"Come on, let's see what it is," proposed Blake. He and his chum ran to where the flagman stood, and, as they rounded the curve, they saw ahead of them a break in the line, where a bridge had been swept away. The train could go no farther.

"Look at that river!" cried Joe, pointing to the big stream. It was not the Mississippi, but a side stream, swollen by the heavy rain, and it

was adding its waters to those of the big river.

There was scarcely any sound to be heard, save the splatter of the rain, the river not rushing along with a roar, as flooded streams sometimes do. But that there was terrible power in this silent current could not be doubted. And much debris was being carried along in the muddy waters.

"What is it?" asked Mr, Ringold, as he came up to join the boys. They pointed to where the bridge had been swept away.

"Well, we'll have to get a boat, to take us on to Hannibal, I guess," said the manager, always practical in an emergency. "Can we get one around here?" he asked of the flagman.

"The railroad has sent for a tug to take the passengers on to the city," the man answered. "I expect she'll be here soon."

"Come on, we'll get our stuff together," said Mr. Ringold. "I'm anxious to get to the city and make some inquiries for the lost ones."

CHAPTER VIII

THE MOTOR BOAT

"THERE she comes!"

"And see! It's all she can do to stem the current!"

Joe and Blake were watching the approach of a small steam tug, that was coming up the stream. Powerful as she looked, it was all she could do to make headway, so forceful was the swollen river.

"We can't all get aboard her," declared Mr. Piper, who, with the boys, Mr. Ringold, and some others, was standing in the rain, near the abutments of the vanished bridge. "If we try to she'll sink."

"Say, please don't talk that way!" begged the manager. "We are going to have troubles enough, without that."

"Oh, all right. But I just want to be careful," spoke C. C.

"The boat will make several trips—there will

be no danger," said the train conductor. "The railroad will look after its passengers."

This was reassuring, but still the danger was great. Now that the moving picture boys were actually at the scene of the flood they realized, better than any printed account, or any pictures, could convey to them, how great was the desolation. It seemed as though a little higher rise in the river would flood the whole country.

"I think I will abandon my idea of trying to make any dramatic pictures," said Mr. Ringold, thoughtfully, as he and the boys watched the approach of the tug. "We will devote our energies to finding the missing members of my company, and in making scenes of the flood. It would be out of the question to try and make dramas. I can see that now."

Blake and Joe had begun to think so themselves, and they were glad to have the manager admit this.

"We're going to have all we can do, just getting pictures under these conditions," declared Blake. "We'll have to be swimming, or in a boat, all the while, I guess."

Mr. Ringold went back to the stalled train to tell the few actors and actresses, whom he had brought from New York with him, that no dramas would be taken. He offered to send them

back, or to look after them in Hannibal, until he returned, but the players decided to go back. They could do nothing in the flooded district.

"And I suppose you'll go back with the others, C. C.," remarked the manager.

Everyone was unprepared for the gloomy comedian's answer.

"No, I'll stick with you and the boys," he said, quietly. "I may be able to help you in the rescue work. I'd give a good deal to be able to find them; especially little Birdie Lee."

"Shake!" cried Mr. Ringold, clasping Mr. Piper's hand. "I guess there's nothing the matter with your liver, after all!"

There was a freight shed near where the train was stalled, and under this those passengers who were not going back, stood, while waiting for the tug to make a landing.

It rained steadily, sometimes coming down in a veritable deluge, and again only drizzling. It was a wet, miserable time for all, but Blake and Joe did not murmur. Their only regret was that the weather conditions were such as to prevent them from using their cameras.

"But it may clear up to-morrow," spoke Blake.

"I hope so," joined in Mr. Piper.

"His liver is still good," murmured Joe.

"Otherwise he'd have said that it would never clear. He isn't so bad—at times."

"No, not at times," admitted Blake, with a grin.

The abutment on which one end of the bridge had rested, served as a pier for the boat, which was, after some difficulty, made fast to it.

"All aboard," called the captain. "We'll take as many as we can, and come back for the rest. It isn't a very long trip, nor is it an easy one. All aboard."

To the delight of Mr. Ringold, he, the boys and Mr. Piper were among the first selected to go. The train conductor had intimated to the boat captain that the manager was anxious to start on a search for missing members of his company who had been in Hannibal.

"We'll do all we can for you," the captain promised. "It's a terrible time, and it's going to be worse. I don't say that to alarm you, but so that you may know what you have to face."

"Thank you," spoke the manager. "I realize that it isn't going to be easy."

The stream, up which the boat had come was not, ordinarily, navigable by such large boats, but the rising waters had turned it from hardly more than a brook into a raging river, pouring into the Mississippi itself.

"Some power to this current," remarked Joe, as he and Blake, having stowed aboard their baggage and cameras, stood at the rail, looking over the side.

"Wait until you get on the Mississippi," remarked a deck hand. "Then you'll see some water."

And the boys did. As they emerged around a bend in the high banks, they had a good view of the Father of Waters as it swept on. It was almost terrifying, and the tug, though extra steam was put on, was barely able to make headway.

"It's getting worse every minute!" the captain murmured. "I don't know what we'll do if this keeps on!"

It was not far, from where the train was stalled, to Hannibal, but the tug was over an hour in making it. The lower part of the town near the river bottom, was under water, but the residential section had, so far, escaped, being built back on high ground.

"Now I'll go back after the others," said the captain, when he had made a landing, not without some difficulty, at a temporary dock.

"And we'll see if we can get into a hotel," suggested Mr. Ringold, "though I guess most of them will be over-crowded."

This was found to be the case. Many persons

had been driven from their homes, and forced to go to the hotels, and, as several of these hostelries had been rendered uninhabitable, those that escaped the flood were taxed to the limit of their capacity.

"It's a good thing my other actors decided not to come along," remarked the manager, as he and the boys, with Mr. Piper, found that all the accommodations they could get were two small rooms, fitted up with cots. "But we won't be here any longer than we can help. I'm going to charter a boat, and start on the search for the missing ones."

"And if this rain ever lets up we'll get some pictures," declared Blake.

At the hotel were many whose homes had either been washed away, or rendered uninhabitable, and they were being cared for by the relief committee, that had been hastily formed. Most of these persons were poor, having their homes in the lower section of the city, and many pathetic stories were told. There had been some lives lost, and a number had been injured by being thrown into the water, and struck by floating debris.

"Now the first thing to do," said Mr. Ringold, after the party had eaten a hasty meal, "is to find out where our friends were last seen. Then

we can start on the hunt. And the next thing is to get a boat. I'll charter a big motor craft, if I can find one, and we'll live aboard her, taking pictures, and conducting the search."

The missing company of moving picture actors and actresses had been stopping at a hotel in Hannibal. But this hotel had been abandoned, and it was not until late that afternoon that a former clerk could be located.

"The moving picture players?" he repeated in answer to questions from Mr. Ringold. "Oh, yes, I remember them very well. We all liked them."

"But what happened to them?" asked the manager, anxiously.

"They all went out together, one day about a week ago," the clerk replied. "The river wasn't as high then as it is now, but it was bad enough. They went off in a small motor boat, and said they were going to one of the lower river islands, to take some scenes. That is the last I heard of them."

"Then they didn't come back?" asked Joe.

"No, the river rose suddenly that afternoon, and we had our own troubles here. I heard nothing more of the players."

"Then they might have been swept on down stream?" suggested Blake.

"I'm very sorry to say that's my opinion," spoke the clerk. "Still, they may have been picked up, and saved. It's hard to get any communications through, as so many wires are down. That's all the information I can give you."

"Thanks; now we'll start on the search," spoke Mr. Ringold. "Perhaps you can tell me where I can hire a motor launch."

This the clerk was able to do. A man had a large craft he was willing to charter, though he wanted a heavy price for it.

"But boats are scarce," he declared, "and they're badly needed in the rescue work."

"That's what we want this one for," said Mr. Ringold. "Now we'll get her into commission."

The *Clytie,* which was the name of the craft, was roomy enough to accomodate the two boys, Mr. Piper and the manager. Blake and Joe had learned to run a gasoline launch, and Mr. Ringold himself was an expert motorist, so there would be no need of a helper.

"But you want to look out for treacherous currents," the owner of the craft warned them. "The river is worse than it's been in years. And remember, you've got to pay the bill if the boat is damaged."

Putting the boat into commission was not so quickly accomplished as Mr. Ringold had hoped.

There were many things to be done, and, at the last moment some repairs had to be made.

The rain stopped unexpectedly the day after the arrival of our friends in Hannibal, and Blake and Joe, hiring a rowboat, went out to get some moving pictures. They secured some fine views, but coming back they nearly had an accident. For their boat was caught in a cross-current, and would have been upset but for the prompt work of Blake, who swung it around and out of danger in time.

"Well, I guess we're ready, boys," announced the manager, two days after he had hired the motor boat. "We'll start out this morning. We've got plenty of food, and other supplies, in case we find the missing ones."

"And we've got plenty of films for pictures!" cried Joe, as he and Blake took their places. The rain still held off, and there were hopes that it would clear long enough for the flood to subside. But this was doubtful.

The Mississippi was still a raging torrent, but the *Clytie* was a stanch craft, and with care would be able to navigate the turbulent stream.

"All aboard!" cried Joe. And thus they started on the trip.

CHAPTER IX

ANXIOUS HOURS

"WHERE are you going to head for first?" asked Blake, as he and Joe began "stowing away" their belongings, while Mr. Ringold stood at the wheel.

"For that island, where the hotel clerk said our friends went to make pictures," replied the manager. "I know about where it is, as nearly as he could tell me, and if they're not on the one they said they were going to, they may be on another, for there are several together."

"Do you imagine they would be there all this while?" asked Joe, as he got out one of the moving picture cameras, for they were at a place now where some thrilling views could be made.

"It is just possible they are," answered Mr. Ringold. "They may have landed, taken some pictures, and then something may have happened."

"Such as—what?" asked Mr. Piper. Of

late he had not made as many gloomy predictions as usual. Perhaps he appreciated what Mr. Ringold said, about there being enough trouble without adding to it by needlessly looking on the dark side.

"Well, their boat may have gone adrift in the rising waters, and they may have been forced to remain on the island," went on the theatrical man. "And there has been so much confusion and suffering out here, that their appeals for help, in case they could make any, may have gone unheeded.

"So I think we'll head for that island, and see if we can get any clews. It is a sort of forlorn hope, but that is the only starting point I can think of. How is she running, Blake?" he asked, for Blake was attending to the motor, while Joe focused the camera.

"Fine," answered the young engineer. "She's a powerful engine, all right."

"She'll need to be," was the grim comment of the manager. "There is some power to this current," and he looked over the side of the bow, at the onrushing, muddy Mississippi. Though they were in the upper reaches of the big stream, it had so increased in size that it was almost a constant menace to the motor boat.

Not only was the current powerful, but there

were waves as large as those that might have been encountered on some bay of the ocean; great, yellow muddy waves, that curled after the *Clytie* as though to overwhelm her. But the craft was in skillful hands.

"Look at that!" cried Blake, as they swept around a bend, and saw, in the flood, several small houses being carried down together. "Get that Joe!"

"I'm getting it!" shouted the young operator, as he turned the lens of the camera in that direction, and began grinding away at the handle.

"I'll put you over closer, so you can get a better view," called Mr. Ringold, as he headed the bow of the motor boat in the direction of the floating dwellings.

As he did so there came a shout from shore, and several men were see to put off in some small boats. They pointed at the houses, and seemed much excited.

"I wonder what that means?" spoke C. C., as he came from the enclosed cabin, out on the deck where Joe had the camera. "I wonder if they think they can haul those houses to shore?"

"It doesn't seem possible—with only their small boats," remarked Blake. "They may be able to anchor them, though, and save them when the waters go down."

"You'd need an ocean tug to pull them out of this current," remarked Joe, as he continued to take moving pictures. "But there must be something up, or those men wouldn't be so excited."

"Maybe they want us to try and tow the houses," suggested Blake.

"Well, we're not going to do it," decided the manager. "It's too risky, though I'd try it if it was to save life."

He had hardly spoken, when the group of houses swirled about in the current. At an upper window of one of them appeared a woman, holding in her arms a baby. She stretched the child out toward those approaching her in small boats, as if appealing for help.

"Say, we've got to save her!" cried Blake.

"That's right!" agreed the manager.

He headed the motor boat more directly for the floating dwellings, but he had to use caution, as they were entangled in a mass of logs, jagged timbers, and other debris, that made it difficult to approach.

And then, by some strange freak of fate, the houses swirled about again, and the woman and child could no longer be seen. But the dwellings remained upright, so it was fairly certain that

the two were safe in the upper room—at least for a time.

Then the current carried the houses on some hidden sandbar, and they rose higher from the water, tilted to one side, and remained there.

"Look out!" cried Mr. Piper, as the manager continued to urge the motor boat onward. "We may go aground ourselves."

"Can't help it—we've got to try to save that woman and baby!" cried Mr. Ringold.

But there was no need for him to risk the *Clytie,* for the small boats, that had put out from shore came up then, and could more easily approach the stranded dwellings.

"We'll take 'em ashore, friends," said one of the men, in a small boat, to Mr. Ringold. "Just as much obliged to you, though. Better keep out from here, or you may stave a hole in your craft."

"Just what I was thinking," the manager replied. "We'll stand by, though, and give you all the help we can."

Then began the rescue of the woman and child from the house on the sandbar. It was accomplished with some difficulty, and the motor boat was in a position where all the details could be seen well. Joe had a good position for his cam-

era, and he ground away at the handle, getting a series of fine views.

The woman, sobbing hysterically, and clasping the child in her arms, was lifted into one of the boats, and wrapped in blankets, for it was beginning to rain again.

"Better let me tow you ashore—or near to it," proposed Mr. Ringold.

"Yes, it would help some—it's hard rowing," answered one of the rescuers. So the motor craft was swung about until the three small boats, which had come out to the houses, could be made fast to her, and then she pulled them across the swollen river to the shore.

The boys did not hear the details of how the woman came to be swept away in her house. It was only one of many cases of people being caught in the suddenly rising waters.

Approaching as near shore as was safe, on account of the floating masses of debris, our friends cast off the towing ropes, and proceeded on their way.

"Well, I got some fine pictures, anyhow," declared Joe, as he put away his camera, for it was now raining so hard that no successful views could be made.

They kept on down the mighty Mississippi, turning now and then to avoid obstructions, and

at times being obliged to swerve almost directly across, which was not easy on account of the powerful current.

The river was constantly making new channels for itself, and leaving old ones, but the *Clytie* was a boat of small draught, and could easily navigate in shallow places.

"Suppose we eat something?" proposed Blake, for it was nearly noon. Considerable time had passed at the rescue work.

There was a small gasoline stove in the cabin of the boat, and they had with them plenty of supplies, so it was not long before a meal was in preparation. And, in spite of their anxiety about the missing ones, our friends managed to eat heartily. Even Mr. Piper seemed to lose most of his gloom, as he passed his cup for more coffee.

"We ought to be near that island now," observed Mr. Ringold, as he looked across at the shore nearest to which they then were. "The hotel clerk said it was opposite a certain town, with two white church steeples. There are the two white church steeples he mentioned."

"There isn't much of the town left," said Blake. "It's pretty well under water." And that was a fact. The lower part was submerged, and as they came up to it, men could be seen going about in boats, removing belongings

from houses, the lower floors of which were already under water.

No lives appeared to be in danger, for the people had doubtless fled to higher ground on seeing the rising waters. On the hills back of the town could be noted a number of tents, where, very likely, the refugees had taken up their abode.

"But I don't see anything of an island," said the manager, as he peered over the turbulent stretch of muddy waters.

"If it was opposite this town, and the lower part of the town is under water, the island is probably covered up by now," observed Blake, grimly.

"I'm afraid so," agreed the manager. "We'll go over there, and make some inquiries."

By going toward shore they were not in such a strong current, and soon the motor boat was cruising along through what had been business streets.

"This is like being in Venice," remarked Joe, as the *Clytie* puffed slowly along between rows of stores and houses, from which men, in boats, were removing goods and furniture.

"Looking for someone?" called a man, who had, in a big scow, an odd collection of household effects, and stuff from a general store.

"For a company of moving picture players,"

answered Mr. Ringold. "They came down to Pin Island, one day last week, to make some drama scenes, and they haven't come back. Can you tell us where Pin Island is?"

"I can tell you where it *was,*" said the man grimly. "Right out there," and he pointed to a spot where nothing but a swirling rush of muddy waters could be seen. "That's where the island *was,* and it's probably there yet, but you can't see it," he added.

"Did you hear, or see, anything of the players?" asked Mr. Piper.

"Well, I did hear that some of them were over there, just before the waters got so high," the man answered. "But what became of them I don't know. I'm very sorry, but I can't help you."

"Well, this is some information, anyhow," spoke Mr. Ringold. "We know we are on the right track."

"You'd best look for 'em below here," the man in the scow went on. "They couldn't hardly make their way against the current. You'll probably find 'em below. There's higher ground there, and they'd have a better chance."

"Is there another town near here?" asked Joe.

"Yes, Bellmead, about four miles below.

They've got a good levee there, and aren't so badly off as we are."

"Then we'll go to Bellmead," decided Mr. Ringold.

The motor boat was turned out from the submerged streets, and into the open river again. It was still raining—quite hard now—and to try for pictures was out of the question, as the sky was dark and lowering.

Keeping out of the middle of the Mississippi, and along one edge, proceeding over what, when the stream went down, would be ruined farming fields, the motor boat went on her way.

"That must be Bellmead," announced Joe, as they made a turn into a "cut-off," or place where the river had made a new channel for itself. He pointed to a place below them, as they could see, more favorably situated than most along the Mississippi. It was protected by a high levee, or bank of earth and stone, and against this the waters were beating.

"We'll land here, and spend the night," decided Mr. Ringold. "No use going on in the darkness, and we may get some news of our friends here."

But they were disappointed in this last. No trace of the missing moving picture players could be had.

"Yes, there's a hotel where you can stay," said a man, one of several on the levee, "but you may have to get out in a hurry."

"Why?" Blake wanted to know.

"Because this levee is weakening, and if it gives way the flood will be worse than ever."

As he spoke many more men came up on the bank, evidently prepared for work. Back in the town, also, could be seen long lines of negro laborers, with wheelbarrows.

"We're going to pile all the dirt we can on the levee," said the man, who appeared to be in charge. "It's going to be an all-night job."

"Then let us help!" begged Mr. Ringold. "We've got to tie up here over night, and our safety, as well as yours, will depend on it. Let us help."

"Sure!" cried Joe and Blake, and Mr. Piper nodded his assent also.

"Well, we need all the help we can get," spoke the man on the bank. "Of course the colored men will do the rough work, bringing up the dirt in barrows, and bags, but they need to be directed. You can help at that."

And then ensued anxious hours. The work of strengthening the levee, to keep the river away from the town, began at once, and was kept up all night, by the light of flaring torches.

CHAPTER X

OFF AGAIN

"More dirt over here!"

"Come on now, boys! Lively's the word!"

"Hustle along!"

"Is she rising any more?"

"Strike up a song, boys, and run; don't walk!"

These were only a few of the remarks that could be heard along the levee that night. The rain drizzled down at intervals, as the colored men, in long lines, with wheelbarrows, brought up earth and stones, to strengthen the banks against which the muddy Mississippi beat and surged. The levee was like a dam along the course of the stream, and back of this dam lay the town. If the levee gave way the town might be wiped out.

Now and then a group of the negro laborers would break out into what was probably some old plantation song, and to the rude but not unmusical melody their feet moved in quicker

time, as they brought up the earth and stones for filling.

"Put more of it in bags," directed Colonel Whitmore, who, as the boys learned, was the man to whom they had first spoken. "It will hold better in bags, boys. Lively now!"

And while squads of men, up the hill where the dirt was being dug, shoveled the earth into bags, others wheeled them down and dumped, or placed, them where directed by the white men.

Blake, Joe, Mr. Ringold and C. C. Piper helped in this work, and though they were only requested to oversee the negroes, they did not hesitate to use their own muscles when they were needed.

In fact, Colonel Whitmore himself, and his friends, worked harder than did any of the black men, who were naturally slow.

"If she goes, boys, it's all up with us, and we'll have to leave everything, and take to the hills," the colonel said. "So be lively, boys!"

"Come on now, everybody sing!" cried one big negro, and he fairly ran with his heavy load, his example being followed by others.

"Oh, if we could only get some pictures of this!" exclaimed Blake, during a lull in the levee operations.

"It's too dark," decided Joe.

"You can get some to-morrow morning," Colonel Whitmore told them. "We'll still be here in the morning, unless the river rises too suddenly."

"Is it going up fast now?" asked Mr. Ringold.

"About an inch an hour, and that's fast enough for us," was the grim answer, and the Southerner looked at a stick he had thrust into the bank at the edge of the stream, to keep watch of the rate of rise. It was marked with little notches, an inch apart, and these notches were slowly, but gradually and relentlessly, being covered by the rising flood of the Mississippi.

All through the night they toiled, the moving picture boys working with feverish energy to do what they could to help save the town. There was really no obligation on them to do this, but they felt a friendly interest in those whose homes were in danger from the great flood.

And the boys, also, might be said to have a little selfish motive. They wanted to get moving pictures of the work of strengthening the levee, as this would form part of the series of stirring views they hoped to get. Thus another of the many phases of the work of fighting the flood could be shown.

Barrow-load after barrow-load of dirt was

piled on the levee, and bags of earth and stone placed where they would do the most good. Everyone was working hard, by the light of the flaring torches. It was hard, dirty and unpleasant labor, for it rained at intervals, all night. Splashing through the mud, slipping and sliding on the treacherous footing, Joe and Blake toiled with the rest. They wore their rubber boots and raincoats, which, in a great measure, protected them.

And, be it said to the credit of Christopher Cutler Piper, he labored as hard as any of the others, and never made a complaint.

"It's coming morning," said Colonel Whitmore, as he pointed to a faint gray streak in the east. "We'll have better light to work by, soon."

Slowly the light grew, and, with the coming of the dawn, the rain ceased—at least for a time.

"That'll give us time to catch our breaths," spoke the Southerner, with a sigh of relief. "But she hasn't stopped rising," he added, as he looked at the stick-gauge. "Too much water up above," and he nodded in the direction whence the boys had come, down the stream. "It'll be days before she goes down."

As soon as it was light enough, Blake and Joe got out a moving picture camera, and began

taking views of the work at the levee. More laborers had come with the advent of daylight, and other white men arrived to relieve those who had overseen the work during the hours of darkness.

The scene on the levee was a lively one, and also a dangerous one, for the waters were beating with ever-increasing force on the sloping wall of earth and stones, that held back the raging torrent from the town.

"This will be one great picture," murmured Joe, as he contemplated the series of scenes.

"That is, if you get a chance to develop it, and show it," remarked Mr. Piper.

"What do you mean?" asked Blake.

"Well, it looks to me as if this flood was going to get worse, and if we go down stream, where the river is wider, we may not be able to pull through."

"Hold on there!" cried Mr. Ringold, shaking a warning finger at the actor. "Don't let your liver get away with you."

"That's so—I forgot," exclaimed C. C. "I guess we'll pull through all right, after all," he added in more cheerful tones.

"That's the way to talk!" cried Blake, encouragingly.

That was one peculiar trait of Mr. Piper's.

He could be gloomy when there was no particular danger, save what he imagined was in prospect. And then, when a crisis came, he rose to the emergency, and was a real help.

The sun tried to break through the clouds, as Joe and Blake finished their pictures, for they did not want to give too much film space showing the mere work of strengthening the levee.

"We want to save some in case—well, not to make a gloomy prediction—but in case the levee breaks," said Blake.

"And it looks to me as though it would go—if this rain keeps up and the river continues to rise," said Mr. Ringold. "I don't know that we can do much else here, so I think we might as well start off again, and continue our search."

They had taken rooms at the hotel the evening before, but they had had very little use of them, since they had spent the night on the levee. Their motor boat had been tied up at a dock.

"Well, let's go up to the hotel, wash, have breakfast, and then continue our voyage," suggested Blake. "Might as well do that as to try to cook aboard. We'll have more room at the Mansion House."

His companions agreed with him, and they were soon enjoying the luxury of a bath and a good meal.

They had scarcely finished, however, before a messenger came up from the river on the run.

"Where's the folks that own that there motor boat?" he demanded, "the folks that helped Colonel Whitmore last night?"

"Here we are!" called Blake.

"What's the trouble?" Joe wanted to know, for the messenger appeared excited.

"You'd better get your craft out of the way," went on the man. "The river's started to rise suddenly, and she may be damaged where she is."

"We'll get right down to her," exclaimed Mr. Ringold, and, paying their bill, they hastened to the dock. They found the *Clytie* pulling and straining at her mooring ropes, for the river had indeed risen and the cables were taut, caused by the elevation of the boat at the dock.

"All aboard!" called Mr. Ringold, and soon they were under way again. There was no need of their assistance at the levee, for all possible was being done by the town inhabitants, and those on the elevated bank of dirt and stones waved a farewell to our friends, as they went on down the raging river.

CHAPTER XI

UPSIDE DOWN

"SAY, there's a lot more stuff coming down the river than has at any time yet," remarked Blake, as he and his friends sat in the cabin of the *Clytie,* while she made her way in the flooded stream. "Look at those big logs, and parts of houses!"

"Yes, and we've got to be careful," said Mr. Ringold, who had relinquished the wheel to Joe. "First thing we know we may bump into a log, and have a hole stove into us. Then we will have trouble!"

"Oh, I guess——" began C. C., when there came a bump on the port bow of the craft.

"What's that?" cried the manager, leaping to his feet.

"Only a little log," answered Joe. "I didn't see it until I was right on top of it, or I could have steered out of the way."

"I was going to say I guessed nothing would

happen," went on C. C., "but I reckon I was a bit mistaken."

"If it's nothing worse than that we won't kick," murmured Blake. "Still you never can tell. I'll come up there, Joe, and help you keep a lookout for big bits of wreckage."

"It would be a good idea to have two at the wheel," said Mr. Ringold. "We'll do that after this, and we won't try to do any night travel—we'll just tie up at dark, wherever we can."

"There must be a worse flood up above, than there was at first, to bring all this stuff down," observed Joe, when he and Blake were on duty. "Whole villages must have been swept away, to judge by the pieces of houses I've seen."

"Yes, and farm-places, too," added Blake, as he pointed to a part of a wrecked barn swirling around in the water.

A little later they passed a village, partly submerged, and as they swung in close to it Mr. Ringold shouted questions as to the possible whereabouts of his lost players. No one, however, knew anything about them. They seemed to have disappeared.

Whenever Blake and Joe saw interesting sights they used the moving picture cameras to advantage. But much of the desolate scenery along the flooded river was of the same character, and

they wanted to save their films for more dramatic situations.

Though the river was higher, the rain, which had ceased that morning, did not commence again, and the skies seemed much brighter.

"I don't know much about the weather conditions out here," said Mr. Ringold, "but it looks to me as though it were going to clear."

"I hope so," murmured Mr. Piper. "It feels as if I'd never get dried out."

It was indeed damp, muggy and sticky. The moving picture boys, too, found difficulty in getting satisfactory results under such weather conditions, but they did the best they could.

"What are you doing?" asked Joe of Blake, on the afternoon of the day they had left the levee.

"Making some waterproof covers for the exposed film," was the answer.

"To keep it dry from the rain?"

"No, to keep it dry in case we—well, in case anything happens, as Mr. Piper would say."

"What do you mean?" Joe wanted to know.

"I mean we may have an accident at any time. While this motor boat is a good one, she may be wrecked, especially when we get down to the lower river, where the flood is sure to be worse. There'll be more debris there, and we

may easily be stove in, crushed or upset."

"Say, you're worse than he is, lately," cried Joe, with a nod at Mr. Piper, who was out on the stern deck.

"No, I only want to take all precautions," Blake went on. "We've got some valuable films here, and if they fall into the water they'll be spoiled. It was bad enough for Munson, or whoever it was, to take our other films, and I don't want to lose these in the flood. So I'm going to stow them away in water-tight boxes, as fast as we expose them."

In anticipation of water troubles the boys had brought along some sheets of rubberized cloth, and this was now used to line, and wrap about and seal up, small boxes, in which the exposed films could be packed. Thus it was hoped to save them.

Dinner had been eaten aboard the boat, and then, as they proceeded, they stopped at several places along the flooded Mississippi, to make inquiries for the missing ones.

But so many persons had either been carried away by the great flood, or driven from their homes, and so many unfortunate occurrences filled the minds of the people, that no one could remember, or tell about, any missing moving picture players.

Then, too, at several of the towns, the levees were in danger, and all available help was engaged in making them stronger. It was a time of stress and trouble for all.

After leaving one small city, that was threatened by the rising river, our friends proceeded well out in the stream, as they had been informed a dangerous "cut-off" had formed just below, and they might be drawn into it, and stranded in a big swamp.

"We'll avoid that, if we can," said Mr. Ringold, as they came within sight of the "cut-off," and saw where the stream had divided.

The manager was at the wheel, and, as he put it hard over, so as to give the dangerous current an extra wide berth, the motor unexpectedly stopped.

"What's the matter?" cried Mr. Ringold, as he noticed, with alarm, that they were being drawn into the "cut-off."

"Motor's gone dead!" cried Blake, as he sprang toward it. "I will see if I can start it."

But though he turned and turned again the flywheel, the machine would not go. It was rather an old-fashioned one, and worked hard.

"Got plenty of gasoline?" asked Joe, coming up to the help of his chum.

"There was half an hour ago, and we can't

have used up all in the tank yet. Besides, we've got a barrel in reserve."

"I'll put some in, anyhow!" cried Joe. But, when this was done, the motor still refused to go, and they were being carried by the current nearer and nearer to the dangerous place.

"Let me try," suggested Mr. Ringold. "Here, you boys steer, though you can't really do much without power to give us more headway than we've got."

Again and again he spun the wheel, but it seemed of no use. The motor remained dead. Then, as Mr. Piper came up to see if he could lend any aid, he saw a small dangling wire, that no one appeared to have noticed, or attended to.

"Is that the trouble?" he asked. "That loose wire?"

"That's it—the ignition!" cried Mr. Ringold. "I'll have it fixed in a jiffy now. Though I don't know as we can make it," he added, as he noticed how near they were to the treacherous "cut-off."

But he was not one to give up easily, nor were his companions. The broken wire was hastily joined, and then, with the electric current in proper shape, when the flywheel was spun again, the motor responded with a welcome roar and throb.

"Now see if we can make it!" cried Mr. Ringold, as he took the wheel. "It's a bare chance!"

It was, and how slender the boys did not realize until later. The powerful current pulled and tugged at them, to force them off the course, and into a branch of the stream that ended in a dismal swamp.

But the *Clytie* was a stanch craft, and was in good hands. Slowly but surely she fought her way against the cross-current, pulling away from danger.

"I'm giving her all the gas she can take," murmured Mr. Ringold, as he advanced the throttle to its limit, and set the spark timer at its most advantageous position. "She can't do any more!"

Blake and Joe stood ready to do all possible, but it was not much. They had to depend on the motor. And that machine made good. The propeller, beating the muddy water to foam, slowly shoved the craft ahead, and to one side, until, finally, the pull of the cross-current was lessened. Then, gathering speed, the boat made her way into the main channel.

"Safe—for a while at least!" cried Mr. Ringold.

The danger to which they had been exposed

rather unnerved them for the time being. All that afternoon they kept on down the great river, the boys taking occasional pictures. The rain still held off, for which they were very thankful.

"And now we'd better look for a good place at which to tie up for the night," remarked Mr. Ringold, when preparations for supper were under way.

"That looks like a good place, just around that bend," spoke Blake, pointing to it.

"We'll make for it," decided the manager.

As they went along they found that the bend was caused by a "-cut-off" having made a new channel for itself, to the left of the main stream. This "cut-off" was larger and deeper than any they had yet encountered. It was bringing down a mass of debris, too, and some care had to be used in navigating near it.

"That will do for a place to spend the night," decided Mr. Ringold, as he shifted his course slightly. They were behind a wooded point, and, as they rounded it, the two boys uttered cries of astonishment.

For, coming straight toward them, was a small house, turned completely upside down in the water.

CHAPTER XII

CHARLIE HOUSE

"Look at that!" cried Joe.

"I should say so!" echoed his chum.

"Must have been a queer freak of the flood that could do that," commented Mr. Piper.

"Me for a picture!" exclaimed Joe, as he got out the camera.

"Is there light enough?" questioned Blake.

"I guess so—for a short run of film," answered his chum, and then, as the house, in its queer position, drifted down stream, and as the motor boat approached it, the occupants seeking a safe place to tie up for the night, Joe got a series of moving pictures.

"There it goes—stranded!" cried Blake, when his friend had finished grinding away at the crank of the camera. And, as he spoke, the house came to a sudden stop.

Probably the roof which was submerged in the water, had struck against a sandbar, or some

high place in the land that was under water.

At any rate, the upside-down dwelling turned slowly about, settled a little to one side, and then remained stationary in the water. It had stranded in a small cove, in which the moving picture boys, and their two friends, had also decided to take shelter for the night.

"We'll tie up to that big tree over there," said Mr. Ringold, pointing to a large oak that overhung the water. "I think that will stand, even though the waters rise higher."

"Tie with a long rope," advised Mr. Piper. "The river may rise suddenly in the night, and if we are held fast by a short cable, and can't rise with the 'tide,' we'll sink."

"I'll look out for that," promised the manager. "But I think the river is not rising so fast now. We can tell when we get near shore."

"It looks like more rain," remarked Joe, with a glance at the sky. "You wouldn't think there could be so much water; would you?"

"Hardly," agreed Blake.

The work of making the boat fast was soon finished. Certainly the oak tree to which they tied seemed, with its great trunk, and spread of roots, strong enough to withstand many a flood.

"And now for supper!" cried Joe, it being

his turn to prepare the evening meal. The gasoline stove was started, and soon the appetizing odor of ham and eggs floated over the flood-waters, for our friends had purchased a supply at the last village where they had stopped to make inquiries.

"I only hope Birdie Lee, and the rest of 'em, are having as good a meal as this," murmured Blake, as he passed his plate for a second helping. "I'd give a good deal to know where they are now, and be able to help them."

"I think we all would," came from Mr. Ringold, and he spoke rather solemnly. "It's strange we can't get any word of them," he went on. "At the next town we make, if they have any telegraph service, I am going to wire my New York office, and ask if any word has been received there. Levinberg probably knows I'd be anxious about them, after hearing of the flood, and he might think to wire me."

"Pretty bad telegraph service, all along the river now, I guess," commented Mr. Piper.

"But they may be able to get a message through, somehow," said the manager, hopefully. "We'll wait half a day or so, after I send the dispatch, in case an answer should come back."

Supper over, the bunks were arranged for the

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night. The weather was calmer now than at any time since the storms began that had caused the flood. The sun shone through the clouds a little, as it set. Blake and Joe, on the after deck of the motor boat, looked about them. On all sides stretched a vast extent of waters. They had driven a stake in near shore, and watched it to note the rise of the river. It was very slight now.

"Say!" exclaimed Blake, as he glanced over toward the upside-down house, "let's go over there and look inside. Maybe we can find something of value, that we might save for the owners."

"I'm with you," agreed Joe. Mr. Ringold offered no objection, and, after casting off the line, the motor boat was started up, proceeding slowly to the side of the overturned dwelling. The craft was then made fast to a hook in one corner.

"Let's go in," proposed Blake, when they had gazed through a window for a moment, not being able, however, to distinguish much.

"How do you act in an upside-down house?" asked Joe.

"You have to walk on the ceiling, of course," answered his chum. "The ceiling is the floor and the floor the ceiling. Come on."

They crawled in through a window. As Blake

had said, they had to step on the ceiling, and with caution, too, for it was only lath and plaster. Over their heads was the floor, with the sagging carpet still tacked to it.

Of course all the furniture was on the ceiling, too, and it was in great confusion. Bureaus had fallen on their sides, smashing the plaster, and pictures had dropped from their hooks and lay on the ceiling. The house was a flat-roofed one, and all of what had been the third story was now under water. The third story was now the cellar, and the cellar, or what had corresponded to it, was the attic. Though, as the bottom of the cellar had been left on the ground when the house was washed from the foundations, there was no roof to the "attic."

"Quite a mix-up!" murmured Joe, as they went from room to room, stepping over the tops of the door openings.

Beds and furniture were piled in confusion in the different rooms, much of the stuff being broken. There were evidences, too, that water had come in some of the rooms, probably when the house turned over, but it had drained out, and now the rooms on the middle or second story were comparatively dry.

"Let's go upstairs, or, rather, downstairs, to the first story," suggested Blake.

Once on the top, or, rather, bottom floor, the

boys found more confusion. The dining room table had fallen with its legs in the air, and piled about it was a buffet and chairs. The dishes lay about, broken and cracked.

In the kitchen the weight of the stove, falling from the floor to the ceiling, had caused it to crash through the lath and plaster, in which it was imbedded, partly covered by the cooking utensils.

"Nothing much of value here," commented Blake, as they walked about on the ceilings.

"Let's go back up; or, rather, downstairs," suggested Joe.

"Find anything?" asked the manager.

"Nothing worth saving for the owners," Blake answered.

"Well, then, we'd better be getting back," suggested Mr. Piper. "It will soon be dark, and there's no telling when this house may go adrift, or turn right-side up again. I don't want to be in it when it does."

They were about to crawl out of the window again, to get into their boat, when a curious cry stopped them.

"Hark!" exclaimed Blake. "What was that?"

"It sounded like someone crying," said Mr. Piper.

"Mamma! Mamma!" came the plaintive call from one of the bedrooms.

"It *is* someone crying!" decided the manager.

"And in here, too," added Blake, as he made a turn in the direction of the sound.

Again it came—a pitiful cry:

"Mamma! I want you!"

"Where are you? Who are you?" asked Mr. Ringold, as he and the others followed Blake.

And there, sitting up amid a pile of bedclothes in a corner, hitherto unobserved, was a small boy, about eight years old. He had evidently just awakened, and was starting to cry. He rubbed his sleepy eyes.

"Well, my little man, who are you?" asked the manager, kindly.

"I'm Charlie," was the answer, "and I want my mamma."

"Charlie; eh?" went on the manager. "Well, tell us your other name, and maybe we can find your mamma for you. What's your last name?"

"Ain't got none. I'm just Charlie, and I want my mamma!" was the answer.

"Just Charlie," went on Mr. Ringold. "Well, I guess we'll have to take you along with us, and we'll try to find your mamma. Will you come with us, Charlie—er—well, 'just' Charlie?" and he smiled at the little chap.

"Call him Charlie House," suggested Joe, with a smile. "We found him in a house, so call him Charlie House."

"Good idea! We will!" decided the manager. "Will you come with us, Charlie House?"

"Yes, I'll come with you," answered the boy, as he threw off the bedclothes. "But my name is just Charlie."

"Well, Just Charlie, or Charlie House, come along then. I expect you're hungry, and we'll feed you, and do all we can for you," the manager said.

With the confidence of childhood, that knows no fear, the boy walked over the ceiling toward the rescuers. His clothing was in disorder, and his face was grimy from crying. Evidently, after the accident, he had cried himself to sleep. How he came to be alone in the overturned house could be but guessed.

"What's that?" suddenly cried Blake.

The whole house seemed to shake and tremble.

"She's adrift again, and going to turn over!" yelled Joe. "Come on! Let's get out!"

It was evident that the dwelling was going to be righted by the flood, for it tilted more and more.

CHAPTER XIII

LOOKING FOR MOTHER

"Look out!"

"Make for the boat!"

"Grab up the boy!"

"Lively, or it will be too late!"

Thus exclaiming, the rescuers made their hurried way toward the window, near which the boat was tied. Mr. Ringold had caught up Charlie House, as they had elected to call him, and, with the child in his arms, was given the right of way—that is, the others stood aside, and let the manager get to the window first.

Luckily the turning of the house was slow, and by a chance swirl of the current, the motor boat had been swung broadside to the window.

Also the tilting of the house was in the direction of that side where was the window by which they had entered, so that the upper part, corresponding to the sill, was nearer to the water, so they could more easily get over it, and into the *Clytie*.

In an instant Mr. Ringold had leaped into the boat and moved back out of the way, to make space for the others.

"Go ahead, boys!" cried Mr. Piper, as he stood to one side in the house, near the window, and waited for Blake and Joe.

"No, you go!" insisted Blake.

"Come on—don't argue! She's going to turn over again!" cried Mr. Ringold, and then the gloomy comedian fairly thrust, first Joe, and then Blake, through the window, from which the sash had been broken. The moving picture actor followed an instant later, and not a second too soon.

"Cut the rope!" yelled the manager, who was holding Charlie. The boy was crying again, probably from fright.

With one stroke of his keen-bladed knife, Blake severed the cable, and the boat drifted away from the house.

And, no sooner was the craft free than, amid a great swirl of the waters, the dwelling turned right-side up again, the furniture and kitchen utensils inside falling from ceiling to floor with a crash.

So big was the wave caused by this righting of the house that the *Clytie* was nearly swamped She bobbed about on the swell, and went nearly

over. But she was a well balanced craft, and, after a bit, rode on an even keel once more.

"Narrow escape, that," said Mr. Ringold, solemnly, as he tried to comfort Charlie. The little lad was sobbing:

"I wants my mamma, I does! I wants my mamma! I want to go home!"

"We'll take you home, and to your mamma, as soon as we can," promised the manager, soothingly. "But don't you want to sleep in this nice boat, to-night? And see, I'll make the choo-choo engine go for you. Won't that be nice?"

"Yes," answered Charlie, now, smiling through his tears.

The motor was set going, and, as the house drifted on down stream, upright once more, and freed from the sandbar on which it had stranded, the motor boat was steered toward the big oak tree, where she was to be tied for the night.

Charlie House was so interested now, in the working of the machinery, and the various novel sights aboard the motor craft, that he forgot his loneliness. Blake spread him some bread and jam, and this completed the temporary happiness of the poor little waif.

Later he was given more supper, which he ate with a fine appetite, showing that he must

have been without food for some time. There was a spare bunk on the *Clytie,* and Charlie, the traces of his tears washed away, was soon sleeping comfortably in this.

"What are we going to do?" asked Blake, when the others sat in the small cabin that night, talking over the situation.

"Well, we've got to try to locate his mother; of course," said Mr. Ringold. "I'll have a talk with him in the morning, and see if I can't find out from what town or city it was his house was carried away. He ought to know where he lived, even if he doesn't recall his own name. And that may come to him by daylight. We'll just let him sleep now, and get some ourselves."

"For we've got a lot of work ahead of us," commented C. C. Piper.

"Going to stand watch and watch to-night?" asked Blake.

"I don't see any need of it," answered Mr. Ringold. "We are out of the way of the main flood here, and, even if the river does rise, we'll be all right. I think we'll all go to bed."

The night was a rather restless one for all save Charlie House. The little chap slept through it all, though about midnight the river began to rise again, as those aboard the boat could tell by her motions. But they were

moored with a long cable, and it would need a great lift to put them in danger.

"Did my mamma come?" asked Charlie, as soon as he opened his eyes in the morning.

"No, but she'll be here soon, I hope," said Blake, who was near the bunk of the small chap. Charlie's eyes filled with tears.

"Come on, and see me get breakfast," urged Joe, who was willing to do his share in providing amusement for the little fellow. "I'll show you how to make flap-jacks," he went on.

"What's flap-jacks?" asked Charlie, interested at once.

"Well, maybe your mamma calls them griddle-cakes—or pancakes," said Blake.

"Oh, I love pancakes!" Charlie exclaimed, and the danger of a crying spell was over, for the time being, at least.

With prepared flour, Joe mixed up a batter, and soon the cakes were browning on a greased griddle, on the gasoline stove. There was maple syrup to eat on them, and with hot coffee for the older ones, there was served a meal anyone might have enjoyed.

"We're having it too easy," complained Blake, as he took a third helping of cakes. "It seems as though, in a flood like this, we ought to be eating hard tack."

"Well, we may come to that yet," said Joe, with a sigh. And it was not long after that when they recalled this talk, at a time when indeed they would have given much for even some hard tack.

But matters were propitious enough now, and, after the morning meal, the boat was started off again on her now double quest.

"I think the best plan for us to follow," said Mr. Ringold, when they were heading into the main river, "will be to stop at the first town we come to, and make inquiries, both about our friends, and Charlie's mother. I'll question him and see if he knows where he used to live."

But Charlie's memory was either very faulty, or the events of the flood had driven all recollection from his mind. All he could say was that he lived "home" with his papa and mamma, and he wanted them both, though, for the time, he was willing to stay with his new friends, and watch the "choo-choo" engine.

"But what did your father do?" asked Blake, thinking they might get some clew, if they knew his occupation.

"He works," said Charlie, contentedly. "He works for mamma and me."

"And you don't know where you lived?" inquired C. C.

"I lived home," was all Charlie would say.

"Then it rained, and mamma and papa took a lot of things out of our house, over to grandma's house. Grandma lives on a hill."

"They must have moved their valuables out when they saw the flood rising," commented Joe.

"What happened after that?" asked Blake.

"It rained," said Charlie, simply. "Mamma and papa took more things over to grandma's, and I went to sleep. When I woke up it was all dark, and my bed was crooked. I guess I fell out of my bed," he added.

"That was when the house went upside-down, I guess he means," suggested Mr. Ringold. "I can imagine what happened," he went on, in a low tone, as the boy went to the after rail to watch the debris floating by. "His folks began carrying out their valuables, and left him in the house. They made one trip too many, and the house was carried away, and upset. Charlie was in it, and he stayed in it until we rescued him. Now we've just got to trust to luck to find his folks."

They were fairly out on the flooded Mississippi again, and from the manner in which they were tossed about, and swirled this way and that, it could easily be guessed that the river had been augmented during the night, and that more rain had fallen along the upper water-shed.

They stopped, about noon, at a small village, partly under water, and, while Joe and Blake made some pictures, Mr. Ringold and C. C. inquired for any word of the missing players, and for news of Charlie's folks. To send off any telegrams proved out of the question.

So many families had been separated, and so many mothers were looking for lost children, as well as children inquiring for missing parents, that no progress was made.

However, Charlie House seemed contented enough now, with his new friends. He was much better off than in the upside-down house, for he was comfortable and had enough to eat. He had been rescued only just in time, too, for he probably would have been killed, or at least severely injured, when the dwelling righted itself again.

The work of saving their belongings was being undertaken by many of the people of the village where our friends stopped, and scenes of this were filmed by the moving picture boys. Work was also in progress on a hastily-constructed levee, in an endeavor to prevent the whole of the town from being washed away.

Once more the rescue party was off. There was more danger now, as there was still more

debris coming down the big, muddy water, and several times the boat was nearly struck by a floating house, or barn.

"We've got to keep a sharp lookout!" decided Mr. Ringold. "It won't do to be swamped—there'd be no getting ashore in this flood. Keep your eyes open, boys!"

With one in the stern and another at the bow, taking turns, the rescuers did all they could to prevent the boat from being damaged, by fending off logs and heavy driftwood.

The day wore on, and though they stopped at several other towns, in a search for Charlie's mother, their quest was unsuccessful. Nor was anything heard of the missing players.

"Well, I guess we'll have to look for another stopping place for the night," remarked Mr. Ringold, late that afternoon. He was about to turn the wheel over to Joe, for a rest, when Blake, who was in the extreme bow, cried out:

"Quick! Put her over! We're going to ram a barn!"

CHAPTER XIV

FIRE AND FLOOD

For a moment Joe and Mr. Ringold did not know whether or not Blake was joking. But the lad in the bow cried again:

"Steer to the right, or you'll be into the barn, sure! It's directly in our course!"

And then Blake, springing back out of the front of the boat, gave his chum and the manager a clear view ahead, for he had been rather obstructing their vision. The two at the wheel saw a small barn, swirling around in the water. It was upright, and was directly in their path.

With a quick spin of the wheel Joe turned the rudder, and the *Clytie* glided past the barn, her rub-streak fairly grazing the structure. The barn had been hidden from view by a large tree which had drifted down with it, and the sudden separation of the foliage and the farm structure, revealed the latter to Blake just in time.

Then, as the motor boat swept on, there came from the interior of the barn a loud:

"Moo!"

At the same moment a cow stuck her head out of a small window, and looked piteously at the rescuers.

"Too bad! We can't do anything for you, old cow!" cried Blake. "I guess you're done for, unless your barn floats to shore. I wish we had room for you," he went on, whimsically, "for we could use fresh milk very nicely." They had been obliged to put up with the condensed variety thus far.

The barn swept on down stream, turning around and around, as the boat went past it, the cow's head appearing at each turn, thrust through the window.

With a small moving picture camera, Blake got a few views of this odd scene, to add to the others already taken.

They decided to tie up for the night just above a small town, that was far enough from the banks of the Mississippi to have escaped the flood, thus far. But the inhabitants were in constant fear, and all available men were at work strengthening the levee.

Our friends managed to purchase a few supplies, and they got some fresh milk, which luxury Charlie had missed very much, for he was accustomed to drinking it.

The little boy was quite fretful after supper, and cried for his lost home and parents. But Blake induced him to listen to some fairy stories, and finally Charlie House fell asleep, and was put in his bunk.

"Poor little chap," murmured Blake, as he tucked the child in snugly. "Poor little chap!" And then Blake thought of Birdie Lee, and the others of the lost theatrical party.

"If you boys will stay here with the boat, Mr. Piper and I will go to town and see if there is any answer to the telegram I sent this morning, from the upper village," said Mr. Ringold, when dusk had fallen. He had taken this method, instead of waiting for an answer to his wire. A message had been sent to the New York office, asking if any news had been received of the missing ones, and a request was made that any reply might be sent to Canton, which was the village above which they were now tied up.

"Sure, we'll stay here," agreed Joe. "And I hope you get some word."

But it was a vain hope, there being no reply to the message of inquiry.

"The river is slowly rising," remarked Mr. Piper, with something of a return of his former gloomy manner. "It's going up about an inch and a half an hour. The townspeople are afraid

it will break the levee, which is only a temporary one."

"I wouldn't want to live out in this country," commented Blake. "This flood is likely to occur every year."

"Oh, I guess they're used to it, somewhat," spoke Mr. Ringold. "But this is the worst they ever had. I'm really alarmed for our friends."

"I've been alarmed all along," went on C. C. "That is, of course there may be a chance for them," he said, quickly, for he had made up his mind, at least while on this voyage, to try to look on the bright side of things.

"I sincerely hope there will be a chance," murmured Mr. Ringold. "I would feel very badly, indeed, if I thought they were lost while making pictures for me."

For some time that evening the rescuers sat about in the small cabin, talking over the situation. For some reason, though no one could account for it, there was a feeling of gloom in the hearts of all. Perhaps the fact that no word had come from New York induced it. But, certain it is, that no one felt very cheerful.

They were moored near shore, and just above where the temporary levee, to protect the village, began. Below, above, and in front of them, swirled the dreary waste of waters. The Mississippi had spread itself out to more than twice

its usual width, and had inundated much valuable land. It had washed away many houses and farm buildings, and many towns and cities were partly under the flood.

And there was no certainty that the storm was over. True, the skies brightened now and then, but, as night fell, the heavens were overcast once more, and the wind, shifting, seemed to promise more downpours.

"I guess I'll put double water-proof wrappings on the films, to-night," said Joe, just before he prepared for bed. "I certainly wouldn't want anything to happen to them now."

Blake aided him in the work, and the boxes of exposed films were made as secure as possible against dampness and water.

In the middle of the night Blake awoke. He heard a curious roaring, throbbing noise on the deck over his head.

"What's that?" he asked, speaking aloud, involuntarily.

"More rain," answered Joe, in a low voice. He, too, had been awakened.

The storm had started again, and the drops were pelting down on the afflicted land.

"This will make the river still higher," went on Blake. "I wish we were out of this—and had the missing ones, and Charlie's folks, safe."

"So do I," answered Joe. "My! but I'm sick of the sound of rain!"

The little boy, in the bunk near Blake, awakened, either from hearing the talk, or from the noise of the storm.

"I'm hungry! I want my mamma!" he called.

"I'll get you something to eat," said Blake, kindly, "and maybe mamma will come in the morning."

He got up, and made some cracker and jam sandwiches for Charlie, who munched them contentedly, and went to sleep again.

Blake then opened the cabin door, and looked out.

"How is it?" asked Joe.

"Pretty fierce!" murmured Blake, as he crept back to his bunk. "Pretty fierce. It's a raging torrent out there."

Morning brought no cessation of the rain, though it was not coming down quite so hard after the dreary dawn broke. As our friends sat down to breakfast, they could see the alarmed villagers working frantically at the levee. For the rising waters were already lapping the top of it.

Long lines of men, carrying bags and baskets of dirt and stones, piled them along the bank—

the frail bank that alone stood between the flood and their homes! The boys took some pictures of the work, and then, casting off the mooring line, the trip down the river was resumed.

Although it rained, Blake and Joe were not idle. They knew that many pictures were needed, and they set to work to get them, though they would not be as good as those made in clear weather.

After dinner, rounding a bend in the stream, they came in sight of a town the greater part of which was under water, and, as they steered toward it, Mr. Ringold having said they would make a stop, Joe cried out:

"Look! There's a house on fire!"

"So there is!" shouted Blake. "Fire and flood together! It couldn't be much worse!"

Those on the boat looked with awe, and feelings of deep sorrow, on the unhappy scene. The fire seemed gaining headway, in spite of the rain, and, as they approached, a second house caught from the first, the black smoke rolling skyward.

"Put over there!" cried Mr. Ringold to C. C., who was steering. "Maybe we can help them—or rescue someone! Put over!"

CHAPTER XV

A HAPPY MEETING

FANNED by a strong wind, the flames gained headway rapidly, and soon both houses were wrapped in fire, while over them hung a black pall of smoke. The dwellings were close together, and it seemed likely that more would catch, as there was no possibility of using the fire engines, if so small a town possessed them.

For the streets of the village were three feet or more under water, and the curious sight was presented of houses surrounded by a flood being destroyed by fire.

"The stoves must have upset, or something like that, to cause the fire!" cried Blake, as the motor boat was steered toward the blazing dwellings.

"They're beginning the work of rescue now," called Mr. Ringold. "See, they're coming in boats."

A number of small craft, containing several

men, who had evidently been engaged in either rescue or salvage work, in another part of the town, came rowing along the inundated streets toward the scene of the fire.

"Look!" shouted C. C. "Someone just jumped from one of the windows then! And there goes another!"

They all looked in time to see a body plunge downward into the water, and one of the boats swerved toward it. Those aboard the *Clytie* saw, a moment later, a woman pulled from the flood, and taken into the small boat.

At the same moment another body shot from a window of the first burning house, and this person, too, was rescued.

"After all, the water is a good thing," remarked Blake, as he hastily oiled the motor. "They couldn't jump on the hard ground, but the flood saves them, even if it does destroy their houses."

"They are certainly having their own troubles," observed Joe.

"We'll help them all we can!" cried the managed. "Get out some of the life preservers, boys, and the cork rings. It may be that we shall need them."

They had provided themselves with these appliances before starting off on their trip, and

Blake and Joe now took them from the lockers and laid them where they could be gotten at instantly.

"I saw a fire once," remarked little Charlie, who was an interested observer of the fearsome scene.

"Did you?" asked C. C., who had taken a great liking to the small chap. "Where?"

"Our barn burned up," the child went on, "but pa, he got our horse out, and the cow."

"He must have lived on a farm," said the actor to the boys, "and yet that upside-down house we took him from didn't look like a farm dwelling. It was more like a city place."

"He may have lived on a farm when he was younger," observed Blake. "I wonder if we'll ever find his folks?"

No one answered him, for they were all intent on watching the fire. Five houses were now ablaze, and people were jumping from all of them, so that the men in the boats had all they could do to make the rescues. Farther along the row of dwellings, persons were preparing to leave, for it was evident that nothing could save their homes except a change of wind.

But boats were needed to enable them to get safely away, and it seemed there were not enough craft. True, the water was not more than three

to six feet deep, and a man, or even some strong women swimmers, might have gotten along safely, but frail ones, and the children, could not.

"We'll have plenty of chance to help!" cried Blake, as they came nearer the scene.

Their approach was welcomed with cheers by those in peril.

"Hurray for the motor boat!" yelled one enthusiastic lad—enthusiastic even in peril. His house was three or four dwellings removed from those already burning.

"We'll take you off!" shouted Joe.

"That's the way!" cried one of the men in the small boats. "Just run 'em over to the high ground, and come back for more. We will have to put up tents to house 'em, I guess."

The *Clytie* was steered close to a burning house, and the anxious eyes of those aboard her sought for signs of life. There were no persons at the windows, however, and they were about to pass on to the next, the roof of which was just beginning to blaze, from the sparks falling on it, when Joe cried:

"There's someone!"

"A little girl!" added Blake, as he saw the figure of a child at an upper window.

"Jump!" called Mr. Ringold, while he re-

versed the propeller, to hold back the boat against the force of the current. "Jump, little girl!"

"I—I'm afraid!" she sobbed.

"We'll save you!" added Mr. Piper, holding out his arms encouragingly. "Jump, the water won't hurt you."

"I must get a picture of this," murmured Blake. "There are enough others to aid in the rescue work, and I'll leave the camera, and help, the minute I'm needed."

"Yes, it's too good a chance to miss," agreed Joe.

And, while the child hesitated at the window, the flames increased. Blake got the moving picture camera into action.

"Come! You must jump!" called Mr. Ringold.

The child hesitated a moment longer, and then, as a backward look into the house showed her the raging fire coming nearer, she burst into tears, and climbed out on the window sill. Waiting there a moment she let herself drop, feet foremost, into the flood.

"Watch her!" cried Mr. Ringold, as he remained at the wheel.

The child disappeared beneath the surface of the mudder water.

"I've got her!" yelled Mr. Piper, as she bobbed up a moment later, and he hauled her aboard.

"Now you're all right, little one," he said, soothingly, as he cuddled her in his arms. "We'll take care of you."

"We'll have to get out of here," shouted the manager. "It is getting too hot!"

They had drifted in close to a burning house—so close, in fact, that blazing brands fell on the deck of the boat. But they were quickly extinguished by Joe. Blake continued to grind away at the camera, getting a series of remarkable pictures of the burning houses in the flood.

The small boats, having taken their loads of refugees to safety, returned to continue the work, and the *Clytie* was steered on down the row of houses to where others were waiting to be saved.

Dwelling after dwelling was emptied of its occupants, and soon the motor boat was laden to the limit of safety.

"We'll take 'em to high ground, and come back!" said the manager, as he turned the bow of the craft up a side street, that led to the hills back of the town.

They went in as near shore as was safe, and then those whom our friends had saved were

taken off on an improvised raft, and cared for by volunteers who had hastily organized to help in this time of stress and trouble.

"The fire will soon burn itself out," remarked Blake, as they went back to it again. "I'll get all the pictures I can, though."

There were only a few more houses left in the row that had started to burn, and when the last of these was gone there was a wide space which would preclude the possibility of more being devoured by the flames—at least until another blaze started.

There was nothing that could be done to check the conflagration. In fact, as the boys learned later, the town was without fire protection, save a volunteer company, with a hand engine, and this was, of course, useless in the flood.

Proceeding to a house at a point below which the small boats were engaged in rescue work, those aboard the *Clytie* saved a number of women and children. These were taken to a place of safety, and another trip back made.

"There goes the last house!" cried Blake, as the final one in the row caught.

"Yes, and there's a woman signaling to us!" added Joe.

"Two of 'em!" yelled Mr. Piper, as he caught sight of two forms at a third-story window.

This house was all aflame on one side, from the water's edge to the roof, but it had not yet kindled on the side where the women appeared. They had made their way to the top floor, perhaps on account of fire being below them.

"Jump!" yelled Blake, as he put aside his camera, for the reel of film had run out, and he did not want to stop to thread in more.

"Yes, jump!" added Mr. Ringold. "We'll save you—it's your only chance!"

"I'm coming!" answered one woman, and she made a dive into some deep water an instant later, evidently being an accomplished swimmer. She came up near the motor boat, and was promptly taken in.

"Come on!" cried Mr. Ringold to the other woman.

She hesitated, and drew back, evidently being in great fear, and she seemed to be saying something, for her lips could be seen to move.

"You must jump!" the manager shouted, as he slowly backed the boat to keep her as nearly as possible in a favorable position for picking up the woman when she dived.

She gave a backward look into the house, and what she saw must have caused her to make up her mind, for she prepared to leap into the flood below her.

The one who had been at the window with her, having gotten her breath after her leap, added her entreaties to those aboard the *Clytie*.

"Jump, Mary! Jump!" she begged. "It's your only chance!"

The woman at the window hesitated no longer. She tumbled, rather than dived, into the water, but the rescuers were on the alert, and though the woman came up some little distance from the craft, Blake, with a boathook, caught her dress, and pulled her close enough so that Mr. Piper could haul her aboard. Then the *Clytie* was put in motion, for the house was burning fast, and her position was anything but safe.

For a few moments after her rescue, the second woman thus saved was hysterical. But her companion attended her, and soon she was more like herself.

"You'll be all right in a little while," said Mr. Piper. "We'll take you to high ground, and the good women there will look after you."

"Oh, what a terrible time it has been—fire and flood!" murmured the one called Mary.

"It certainly has been, but the Lord is good to us—he sent these kind men and boys to save us," the other added, as she looked at Blake and Joe.

"If only He would give me back my little

boy," sobbed the second woman saved. "But oh, the flood has taken him!"

She sobbed on her companion's shoulder.

"There, there," soothed the other, "you may find him some day. Don't take on so, Mary."

"I can't help it, Ellen. Oh, my poor boy!"

It was evident that she was referring to some previous loss. Charlie, who had been in the darkened cabin, started suddenly as he heard the voice of the woman called Mary. He now came out on the open deck, and stared curiously at her. And the woman, who was supporting the head of the other on her shoulder, looked at Charlie.

A change came over her face. She tried to speak but could not. Finally she did manage to gasp:

"Mary! Look! Look! Here's Charlie now! Here's your boy!"

The woman raised her tear-stained face. For a moment she did not comprehend, and then, as a look of great joy showed itself in her eyes, she held out her arms, crying:

"My boy! My boy! Charlie! Is it possible!"

And as for the little lad, with one glad cry, he threw himself into her loving clasp, sobbing over and over again:

"Mamma! Mamma! Oh, I am so glad!"

CHAPTER XVI

A BOLT FROM THE SKY

Blake, Joe and the others looked on in bewildered surprise at this touching scene. That Charlie should have found his mother in this fashion seemed scarcely possible, yet such was the fact.

For several moments mother and son were in each other's arms, murmuring over and over again their protestations of love, and words of wonderment at the meeting.

"Where did you find him?" the mother finally demanded, of our friends aboard the motor boat. "Oh, where ever did you find him?"

"We got him out of a house, just as we did you," said Mr. Ringold, "only it was an upside-down house, and not a burning one. And so he is really your lost boy?"

"Of course he is!" she cried, while Charlie added:

"She's my mamma! I'm awful glad you found her for me. Where have you been, Mamma?"

"It's a long story," she sighed. "But first I want to hear about you. Oh, I thought I would never see you again."

"It won't take long to tell all we know about it," said Mr. Ringold, and he related the facts of the rescue of the boy they had christened Charlie House.

"His name is Charlie Wentworth," explained his mother, "and that was our house from which you saved him. It's strange he did not know his last name, and where he lived, for he has often been lost, and he could always tell where he lived all right."

"I guess the flood frightened him," said Blake, with a smile. "How did he happen to be left in the house?"

"It was because of the confusion of the flood in our town," explained Mrs. Wentworth. "My husband and I were trying to save some of our things, taking them to my mother's place on a hill. We had taken Charlie to a neighbor's house before the water actually reached our dwelling, but he must have wandered back into it again when we did not know it, and have gone to sleep in the bed."

"Yep. I went to sleep in bed," supplemented the lad, with a happy laugh.

"Then the levee gave way suddenly," went on

his mother, "and our house, and several others, were carried away. My husband and I supposed Charlie was safe at the neighbor's until we got there and found him missing. We were frantic, and searched everywhere for him, never dreaming he was in our own house. Then the flood grew worse and we had to flee to high ground. We gave him up for drowned. Oh, it does not seem possible that I have him again!"

"Where is your husband now?" asked Mr. Ringold, as he guided the boat toward the place where the other rescued persons had been landed.

"We came on to this town, where my sister lived," went on Mrs. Wentworth. "This is my sister," she added, nodding toward the woman who had first dived into the flood. "We had to take refuge with her, as we had no other home, and we did not think the flood would come here also. But it did, and it brought my little boy to me!" she cried, as again she clasped him in her arms.

"My husband is out, doing relief work," she resumed, after a moment. "We heard a rumor, this morning, that some children had been rescued from a raft farther down the river and he went down there to investigate, thinking, and hoping against hope, that our Charlie might be one of them.

"He will be more than surprised when he comes back to find my sister's house burned in the flood, and that I have Charlie. Oh, I wish he were here now!"

"I want to see papa!" broke in Charlie.

"And so you shall, my dear boy, as soon as he comes back. I expect him to-night," said Mrs. Wentworth. "Oh, I cannot thank you enough—ever!" and she gazed fondly at our friends.

"It wasn't anything," said Mr. Ringold. "We happened to visit the house out of curiosity, and of course we brought Charlie away when we found him. He's a brave little chap."

A little later the temporary camp, on the high ground, was reached, and there Mrs. Wentworth, her sister and son were cared for by loving hands. The others who had been saved from the burning houses were also being looked after.

"Well, I guess we've done all we can here," said Blake, as they prepared to resume their journey down the river.

The blazing houses were burning themselves out, down to the edge of the water, and the danger from the flames was over. But the peril of the flood still remained, for the waters slowly continued to rise.

"We found Charlie's folks," remarked Joe,

when they had bidden an affectionate farewell to the boy's mother, aunt and others of the rescued ones, "we found Charlie's folks, but we can't seem to locate our own friends."

"And yet we may find them in just as unexpected a manner as we found Mrs. Wentworth," spoke C. C. "I tell you I'm mighty glad we happened along when we did. It's just like a story out of a book."

"It would make a good moving picture, if we could show it all complete," spoke Blake.

"It could be worked up into a drama, with the flood scenes you have," declared the theatrical manager. "I could film the missing scenes later. I believe I will."

"There'll be one happy father to-night," observed Joe, thoughtfully. "When Mr. Wentworth comes back, unsuccessful, and finds his son, he sure will be happy!"

"We'll miss the little chap," spoke Blake. "He was as good as gold while he was with us."

On the chance that there might still be some in need of rescue in the town where the houses had burned, the *Clytie* went back through the flooded streets, but men in small boats were patrolling the district, and, thanking our friends for their work, said they would look after matters now.

"But there won't be much left to look after, if this keeps on," spoke one man, gloomily enough, as he looked over the burned section, and the flooded village. "We've been smitten mighty hard."

"But we'll come up again, when the waters go down!" cried another, more cheerfully. "It might be worse. No lives have been lost, so far, that's one blessing!"

"That's a good way to look at it," said Mr. Ringold, as he directed the craft out into the main flood again, and turned her bow down stream.

As they were all tired, and wet from the work of rescuing those who had leaped into the water, it was decided to make a stop, tie up, have something to eat, and clean the boat, for there was much mud and water aboard from the clothing of the saved ones.

Accordingly, in a sheltered cove, tied to a tree that stuck up out of the flood, they made a halt. The preparation of the meal, and the cleansing of the boat took longer than they expected, and as Blake wanted to get some pictures of that flooded section, they decided to remain there over night, and proceed in the morning.

The weather had cleared again, at least for the time being, and, aside from their anxiety

about the missing ones, our friends were fairly comfortable. They had put on dry clothing, and sat in the cabin of the boat, discussing the strenuous scenes through which they had recently passed.

A loud crash awakened them all about midnight, no watch having been kept. It sounded like some great explosion, close at hand.

"What was that?" cried Blake, sitting up in his bunk.

He had his answer a second later, for there was a blinding flash, and another booming sound.

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed Joe. "It's a storm!"

A moment later there came a deluge of rain, that fairly roared as it struck the deck and awnings of the boat.

"Whew!" exclaimed Blake. "This is fierce! If this keeps up long the flood will exceed its own high-water mark."

"Better take a look at the cable," suggested Mr. Ringold. "We don't want to get adrift in this outburst."

Blake put on a raincoat, and stepped outside. The vivid lightning, and the deafening thunder, kept up, and he was forced to cling to the rail to steady himself against the motion of the craft,

and the force of the wind. The *Clytie* was tugging hard at her mooring cable, which was strained taut.

"It wouldn't do any harm to put on another rope!" cried Blake.

"We'll do it," answered Mr. Ringold, from the sleeping cabin.

Blake made his way to the cleat to which the boat end of the rope was made fast. He saw, with concern, that the rope was frayed, and would not hold much longer.

"Better hurry!" he called, but he had scarcely spoken when the very sky seemed rent with a bolt of lightning, and, as the raging, roaring, flooded river was lighted up by the flash, the rope parted and the motor boat was carried away.

"We're adrift!" yelled Blake, as intense darkness succeeded the bright glare.

CHAPTER XVII

THE COTTON BARGE

For a moment there was the utmost confusion aboard the craft. The words of Blake, the sudden motion as the rope broke, the tossing and pitching, as the boat was borne on the crest of the flood, seemed to deprive them all of the ability to act.

Blake himself had nearly been carried overboard, so suddenly did the cable part, but he managed to grasp a rail and so saved himself.

"Can you see anything?" yelled Mr. Ringold, as he was struggling into his raincoat.

"Only when it lightens," answered Blake. "It's a fierce storm, all right."

The others came out on deck, and, as flash succeeded flash, they viewed the mad scene all about them.

On raced the motor boat, a frail thing indeed in that wild waste of waters.

"We've got to start the engine!" yelled Mr.

Ringold, for one needed to yell to be heard above that storm. "It's the only way we can be safe," the manager added. "Start the motor!"

"And where will we steer?" Mr. Piper wanted to know.

"Anywhere we can, to get in some sheltered place," suggested Blake. "But it's doubtful if we can stem this wind and current."

"We'll have to quarter it," spoke Mr. Ringold, when he had taken an observation, by the aid of a lightning flash.

Meanwhile Joe and Mr. Piper had started the motor, and, as the welcome throb and hum were heard, Blake and the manager went to the wheel.

"Better light up," the moving picture man said. "No telling what we may run into, or what might run into us. There are probably boats afloat, bad as the storm is."

Save for a single light in the cabin, and a riding light outside, the *Clytie* was in darkness when the cable parted. But now the incandescents were switched on. They were operated by a large storage battery, charged by a dynamo, run by the motor flywheel.

With a powerful searchlight at her bow, her stern light, and the red and green side lamps, as well as the cabin lights, aglow, the craft now presented a more cheerful aspect, and she was cer-

tainly safer. The lights, too, helped to take away the really terrifying effect of the vivid lightning.

The place at the wheel was partitioned off, and that little pilot house, as it were, was left in darkness, to enable Blake and Mr. Ringold to see to steer.

They could do little, however, save to try and cross the current in a diagonal direction, to make their way to some sheltered cove.

"This certainly is the limit!" murmured Blake, as he stood at the manager's side. "I didn't think there was any more rain left in the clouds."

"There seems to be plenty coming down," observed the theatrical man, grimly. They listened to it pelting on the cabin roof. It was a constant roar, and added to it was the thunder of the sky artillery, following each flash, and the never-ceasing hiss and hum of the rushing river.

"We'll have to look out for debris as best we can," spoke Mr. Ringold. "There are some big logs afloat, and if one hits us end on——"

He did not finish, but Blake realized what he meant.

"Look! That struck just in front of us!" cried the youth, as he and his companion shrank back, instinctively, from a particularly vivid flash.

His words were drowned in the shock that fol-

lowed, and indeed it was seen that the bolt had struck the water but a little way in advance of the boat. A smell, as of sulphur, filled the air, and there was a sensation as though everyone aboard the craft had received a mild electric shock.

"That was close enough!" murmured Joe, as he come into the cabin, after having seen to the oiling of the motor.

"I should say so!" agreed Mr. Piper, who followed him.

Try as Mr. Ringold did to send the craft out of the main current, he seemed unable to accomplish it. It was as though the boat were in the grip of some powerful hand, that was shoving her forward.

Several times, as they fairly flew onward, the propeller aiding the current in making speed, those aboard felt the bumps and shocks as they struck objects in the water. Fortunately the debris was moving at considerable speed also, and in the same direction as was the motor boat, for serious damage might have been done.

"There goes another hit!" cried Blake, as he saw a second lightning bolt descend into the water. This one, though, was far enough off so that no unpleasant effects were felt by our friends. The bolt from the sky, however, hit and

split wide open a big tree that was floating down stream.

"If it strikes us," murmured Mr. Piper, "we'll——" And then he thought better of what he was evidently going to say, and did not finish his sentence.

"It's of no use," said Mr. Ringold, after a while, "We can't make any headway across the river. We'll just have to go on and trust to luck."

He and Blake kept a sharp lookout ahead, and managed to avoid, several times, collisions with floating debris in the shape of logs, and parts of buildings.

As they rounded a turn, which could be made out by the flashes of lightning, Blake uttered a cry.

"What's that—just ahead?" he shouted.

He pointed to a large black object, looming up on the right.

At the same moment there came another flash, seemingly of greater intensity than any that had preceded it. The flash appeared to completely envelope the big, dark object, and with one voice Blake and Mr. Ringold cried:

"A cotton barge!"

"And struck by lightning, too!" added Blake, a second later, as, despite the downpour of rain,

flames burst from several places on the loaded boat.

The lightning had indeed set fire to the cotton, which was floating down the river. It had probably broken away from the place where it had been moored, or from the tug that was towing it. Rapidly the flames gained headway, and, as there came a sudden cessation to the rain, which might have extinguished them, the tongues of fire leaped higher and higher.

"I hope we will be able to keep well away from her," murmured Mr. Ringold, and for a time it seemed as though they might, for the burning barge was well in advance of our friends.

But it was a vain hope. A little later the barge suddenly grounded on some obstruction, and remained stationary, while the motor boat was borne down directly on it.

"Steer to one side!" yelled Blake.

"I'm trying to!" echoed the manager, but it was easily seen that he was not going to be able to do this in time. A moment later the *Clytie* poked her bow against the barge, with great force.

Fortunately, however, a bale of cotton, hanging partly overboard, took the brunt of the blow, so no damage was done.

"Back water!" cried Joe. "We'll be on fire in another minute!"

It certainly seemed so, for though they had struck the barge at a place where, for the time being, there were no flames, the fire was rapidly enveloping the whole cargo.

Mr. Ringold pulled the reversing lever, throwing in the gears, but the craft remained with her bow still against the cotton barge. The force of the current back of the *Clytie* was too much for her to overcome. She was gradually being swung around sideways to the barge.

The flames were getting hotter. They roared and crackled, and vied with the thunder and lightning in adding to the scene of terror.

"Send her ahead!" suddenly cried Blake. "That's our only chance!"

"What for?" demanded his chum.

"We may be able to shove the barge off the bar, or away from the snag, or whatever is holding her. Then she'll drift away from us. It's our only chance!"

"You're right!" cried Mr. Ringold.

Once more he changed the lever, and now the propeller beat the muddy water to foam, as the bow of the motor boat pushed hard against the side of the barge.

And Blake's advice proved to be the best. For,

hanging an instant on the bar that had caught her, the barge suddenly gave way, and now, almost completely wrapped in flames, she once more started on her journey down the swirling torrent.

Then Mr. Ringold was able, by a quick turn of the helm, and by speeding up the engine, to swing to one side, and away from the burning craft, which was left to go on to her own destruction.

"Whew! Hot work!" exclaimed Blake.

"I should say so," agreed Joe.

The first fury of the storm seemed now to have passed. The thunder was less heavy, and the lightning not so vivid. The rain had started again, but it was a mere drizzle.

For several miles more the *Clytie* went on, at the mercy of the current, and then, as the lightning flash revealed a little cove to one side, Mr. Ringold determined to steer for it.

To his delight he found that the boat answered her helm well, the river being wider at this point, and the current less powerful. And then, a little later, they were able to come into comparatively quiet waters, where, with the aid of the searchlight, they found a big tree, to which they tied, and with double cables.

CHAPTER XVIII

OVERBOARD

"Well, what's the program for to-day?"

"Down the river—more pictures—and make all the inquiries we can about our friends."

It was Joe who asked the question, and Blake who answered it. The moving picture boys were getting breakfast aboard the motor boat, which was still safely tied to a big tree in the cove where they had made a stop the night before, following the fire on the cotton barge.

It had stopped raining, but the sky was not clear, and the flood was all about them, the waters being higher than ever. There seemed to be no cessation to the increase.

"We certainly are getting a fine lot of pictures out of it all," murmured Joe, as he glanced at the pile of films in the water-proof cases.

"Yes, that's the one redeeming feature," agreed Blake, as he put the coffee on to boil.

"How's the weather outside?" called Mr. Ringold, from his bunk.

"Nothing to boast of," replied Blake. "Looks as if it would rain more any minute."

"Anything out there worth filming?"

"Nothing much—a lot of stuff coming down the river, but we've got enough of that," spoke Joe. "I only wish we could have filmed the burning cotton barge, but we had enough to do as it was, to get clear of it ourselves."

"I should say so," came from Blake, as he recalled the danger of the night before.

Breakfast over, preparations were made for again moving down stream. The boys got the camera ready to take any scenes that might be worth filming, and Mr. Ringold and C. C. took charge of the boat.

As the lines were being cast off, there came rowing along the stream, close in to shore, so as to keep out of the strong current, a farmer in a skiff. He seemed somewhat surprised to see our friends, but hailed them, asking:

"I say, you folks ain't seen nothin' of a spotted cow critter around here; have you?"

"A cow? No," answered Blake. "We saw one floating down in a barn a day or so ago. Was she yours?"

"No, my barn's still on land, but my spotted cow critter is missin' and I thought maybe you folks might have seen her."

"She'd have to be swimming if she was around here," remarked Joe, looking at the waste of water.

"Yes, I reckon so," agreed the farmer. "She jest naturally likes to wander off, that spotted cow critter of mine does. I guess she'll be drowned some day. Well, I'll look a little farther, and then I'll git back. Water's gittin' higher all the while. Where you folks bound for?"

"No place in particular," Blake informed him. "We're looking for some friends of ours."

"There's been a good many lost in this flood," the farmer said. "I had two hens and a rooster drowned in the last flood. I lived on low ground then. I've moved back a piece since. I'm hopin' the water don't come up to me now."

"Is there any town near by—below here?" asked Mr. Ringold. Their supplies were getting low, and needed replenishing.

"Yes, quite a good sized one about three mile down the river. The folks is workin' hard too, to keep the water out. There's a big shipment of cotton on the wharves waitin' for a boat to take it off, I hear. But if she don't come pretty soon the cotton will go floatin' off by itself. They can't git no help to move it back, 'cause all the men are busy on the levee."

"That might make a good picture for us," suggested Blake to Joe, when they had called good-bye to the farmer who was looking for his "spotted cow critter."

"I believe it would," agreed Joe. "We'll have a try at it, anyhow."

"Kill two birds with one stone," said Mr. Ringold, "we'll get supplies, and pictures too."

They started down stream, proceeding with care, for there was an unusual quantity of debris in the river—logs, part of lumber rafts, dismantled houses, barns and sheds. But the *Clytie* was navigated safely through it all.

Our friends had gone about a mile, when, as they went around a wooded point of land, they saw a curious sight. It was a large steamer, stranded inland, about a quarter of a mile from the water. It was listed to one side, and about it were many men, engaged in digging a trench, or canal, so as to float the craft back into the stream.

"Well, what do you know about that?" cried Joe, in surprise.

"Got to film her, all right!" declared Blake.

"How could such a thing happen?" C. C. Piper wanted to know.

"They probably went through a 'cut-off,'" explained Mr. Ringold, "and must have gone aground. Then, before they could float her, the

waters took a new direction, made a new channel, and left the steamer where she is. I've read of such things, but never saw one. We'll go over and find out."

The motor boat was directed to a point nearest the inland steamer, and, taking the camera, Blake and Joe went ashore, followed by the manager and actor.

And, while the boys were taking moving pictures of the men at work digging the trench, to bring the river to the steamer, since the boat refused to go to the water, Mr. Ringold questioned the captain.

"That's about how it happened," the latter said, when the manager had asked about the accident. "I tried a short cut, and we anchored for the night right about here. I s'posed I'd have water enough to go on in the morning, and maybe save about ten miles by this 'cut-off.' But, by George! When we tried to start in the morning we found the waters going down, and, before we knew it, we were high and dry. I don't know as we'll ever get afloat now."

Indeed it did look like a hopeless task, but the men were working hard to take advantage of the high water. Once the flood subsided the steamer might never be floated, until another period of unusually heavy rain set in.

"Well, I guess we've got enough of this," re-

marked Blake, as he took the final scenes at the steamer. "Now for some views in the village below."

Once more they were under way, and a little later they came in sight of the town, which was the principal shipping port for cotton in that vicinity.

"Say, there's a big crowd working there!" exclaimed Joe, as they headed for the levee, only a small part of which was out of water.

"Yes, there's a big crowd there, but look at the few who are working at the cotton," spoke Blake. "There's a big pile of it, and it'll take those few men a good while to move it. The water's rising fast, too."

The levee at this town was a sloping one, faced with cobble stones, and when the river was low, horses and wagons were driven down it to the landing stages of the steamers. There were no permanent docks, except on the very top of the levee, and it was there the cotton was stored.

The absence of permanent docks, or wharves, close to the water was due to the sudden rise and fall of the stream at this point. Sometimes the steamers could come up to the permanent wharves, at the top of the levee. At others they were some distance off, and goods had to be

moved down the slope in wagons, to the temporary landing stages, thrown out by the boats.

The danger to the town, should the levee give way, was so evident, that every available man had been called on to strengthen the sloping bank, which kept back the waters. The owners of the cotton, it seems, had appealed in vain for help in moving their cargo back out of danger, and so they were obliged to do the work themselves. And it was no easy matter to handle the big, clumsy bales.

The motor boat was tied where it would not be in the way, and, from the bow, Joe and Blake took a series of moving pictures while Mr. Ringold and C. C. went ashore to get some supplies, and make inquiries regarding the missing theatrical company.

In regard to the latter, however, they received no satisfaction. Nothing had been seen or heard of them. The telegraph line, however, was in good working order, and Mr. Ringold sent a message to his New York office, asking if any news had been received from the missing ones.

"We'll wait for a reply," he said. "It ought not to take many hours, and we can easily spare the time."

"Joe," remarked Blake, when they had filmed several views of the scenes at the levee, "suppose

we take the boat down stream a short distance. I want to get nearer to the piles of cotton, so they will show up well on the screen."

"All right. I can work the boat, and you can manage the camera."

Mr. Ringold and the actor were up in the town, but the manager had told the boys they might move the boat about as they pleased in getting pictures.

Accordingly Joe cast off the line, started the motor and headed the craft nearer to the cotton wharf.

"Hold her there now!" cried Blake, as he took a position at the bow with the camera.

He was grinding away at the handle, paying no attention to the boat, or river, when suddenly a swirl of the current carried a big log directly against the bow of the craft. She was being headed slowly up stream, Joe working the motor only fast enough to maintain a slight headway.

There came a jar that shook the *Clytie* from stem to stern.

"Look out!" yelled Joe to Blake, but the warning came too late. The young moving picture operator shot overboard, into the muddy water, the camera clattering to the deck behind him.

CHAPTER XIX

A COLLISION

"MAN overboard!" yelled Joe, more from a sudden instinct than because there was anyone beside himself on the boat to be informed of the fact. Then, with a leap, Joe was outside the pilot house, and standing in the bow of the still-moving craft.

Joe had caught up, in his rush, a cork life ring, attached to a rope, one being kept on the forward deck in readiness for any emergency in the flood. The young operator shoved the fallen camera to one side, and peered eagerly down for a sight of his chum.

"Here you go, Blake!" Joe cried, a hasty glance toward shore showing him two men coming in a rowboat, in response to his cries. "Here you go! Grab this!"

For he had a glimpse of Blake's head emerging from the water.

Blake was a good swimmer, but he was handi-

capped by his clothes and shoes, and the fact that the current was rather swift.

The young operator shook his head, to rid his eyes of the blinding water, and then reached out for the ring which Joe tossed to him. He caught it in one hand, and then was quickly pulled toward the boat.

"All—all right—Joe—good—work!" Blake managed to gasp.

A moment later he was safe on deck, and Joe had to run back in a hurry to the steering wheel, for the *Clytie* was headed directly for the small boat. The men in it were crying out in alarm, and endeavoring to get out of the way. But the unguided motor craft seemed bent on running them down.

"All right! Don't worry!" shouted Joe, as he twirled over the steering wheel, and changed the course of the boat. "I guess we'd better go back and tie up," he added. "Did you get enough pictures, Blake?"

"Well, we'll call it a day's work," panted the young operator, as he managed to get a full breath after his sudden bath. "I was almost finished when that bump came and knocked me overboard. What was it?"

"A big log. I didn't see it in time."

"Neither did I, or I'd have taken a brace,"

said Blake, grimly. "Well," he went on, as he picked up the camera, and found that it was not damaged, "I guess I'll change my clothes. These don't look just fit for going to a party," and he laughed. The camera had closed automatically when he ceased grinding at the crank, so no pictures were spoiled.

"Can we do anything?" asked one of the men in the boat. They were working on the levee, and had dropped everything, and pushed off in their craft, when Joe's cry of alarm reached them.

"Thank you—no. It's all over," said Blake, as Joe guided the motor boat back to her moorings.

Nothing worse than a wetting was the result of Blake's tumble overboard, and soon, in dry clothing, he was ready for whatever came next. As they had enough pictures of the work on the levee, and at the cotton wharf, the boys decided to await the return of Mr. Ringold and the actor, who had now been gone some time.

"Suppose we go up to town ourselves," suggested Blake, after a bit. "It will give us a chance to stretch our legs, and we can help carry back the rest of the supplies," for the latter had not all been put on board yet.

"I'm with you," agreed Joe; and, seeing that

their craft was securely moored, they went ashore.

The town was a fairly large one, and contained several stores. But business was practically at a standstill now, for everyone who could was working at the levee. There were anxious looks on the faces of all—men, women and children. But women and children were about the only ones in the streets, the men all being at the river front.

"Look!" exclaimed Joe, pointing to a moving picture theater. It was closed, probably from lack of patronage during the flood season, but in front were some advertising lithographs.

"Some of our films!" cried Blake, as he saw some gaudily-colored representations of those pictures he and Joe had taken in earthquake land.

"So they are!" echoed Joe. "Who'd ever thought of seeing them here?"

"I wonder how they took with the audiences?" went on Blake, for he always interested in the financial end of their business, and he and his chum really tried hard to get the very best sort of moving pictures.

"I'd sort of like to know that, myself," murmured Joe.

A small boy was standing in front of the litho-

graphs of the colored pictures, looking at them interestedly.

"Would you like to go in? What time does the show start?" asked Blake, handing the boy a dime, which he took eagerly, and wonderingly.

"Would I like to go in, mister? Well, I guess I would. But they ain't givin' no shows while the river's risin'. Nobody comes and the feller what runs the place says it don't pay him to open. But I saw them pictures," and he nodded at the ones showing a volcano in eruption, and the ground quaking—views that Blake and Joe had taken at a great personal risk.

"How'd you like 'em?" asked Joe, winking at Blake over the lad's head.

"Say, they was the bulliest pictures ever I see, and I go to all the shows when I can!" he cried with enthusiasm. "They was certainly some pictures, believe me! I would like to have been there myself, only not too close," he added, with caution. "The fellers who took them movies sure must have had nerve. I'd like to meet 'em."

"We took those pictures," said Blake, suddenly.

The lad looked at him for a moment. Then a curious look came over his face.

"Say!" he remarked in withering tones, "I'm much obliged to you for the dime—I sure am,

'cause I don't git many. But there ain't no call for you to try to string me that way—jest 'cause you slipped me a dime."

"But we did take those pictures," insisted Joe.

The boy edged away, as though he were afraid they might take strenuous measures to compel him to believe them. Then, as a parting shot, he called out:

"Much obliged for the dime, but I ain't as green as I look, mister. You take them pictures? Bah! Think I'll believe that?" And he set off on the run.

"I guess we might have better kept still," spoke Blake, with a grin at his chum.

"I guess so, too. I s'pose it was asking rather too much to get him to believe a couple of strange fellows took those views. And do you know, Blake," went on Joe, "sometimes when I get to thinking about what we've gone through since we used to work on the farm, I can hardly believe it myself."

"That's right. The stunts we did in New York were strenuous enough for a starter, but in the jungle, and in earthquake land—good night! —as the poet says!" exclaimed Blake.

"And this is going to be worse, if I'm any judge," went on Joe, as he nodded in the direction of the flooded river.

"Guess you're right," agreed his chum.

They kept on through the town, making a few purchases in stores where women were the only clerks, the men being down at the levee.

"There they are!" exclaimed Joe, as he and Blake turned into the main street, from a side one, and caught sight of Mr. Ringold and C. C.

"They look as though something had happened," observed Blake, as he noticed their friends hurrying toward them.

"Maybe they heard about you falling overboard, but didn't hear of your rescue," suggested his companion. But it was not that, as the boys learned a moment later.

Waving a slip of paper over his head, Mr. Ringold cried:

"I've got news, boys! News of our missing friends!"

"Really!" cried Joe.

"Yes, they heard from them in the New York office. I just received a telegram. It's quite a story."

"Where are they?" Blake wanted to know.

"Somewhere down the river," answered Mr. Ringold. "A message came from them in a bottle."

"A bottle!" cried Joe.

"Yes. They must have been carried down on

the flood, and only had time to write a hasty message and fling it, stopped up in a bottle, into the river. Here's a long telegram from the New York office. I'll condense what it says."

"Then it's really news from them—from Birdie Lee and the others?" asked Blake.

"It surely is," answered the manager. "What happened after they went to the island to make moving pictures isn't stated. But a few days ago this telegram came to the New York office."

He then read:

"We are being carried down the river on part of a house that was washed away in the sudden flood. We are all together, but suffering very much. The waters rose very suddenly. Cannot tell where we will land. I am writing this and putting it in a bottle, which I will throw into the flood. Someone may pick it up and transmit it to you. Come to us if you can!"

For a moment the boys were silent, and then Blake asked:

"How did the message get to New York?"

"I had to make inquiries to find that out," replied Mr. Ringold. "It seems that the bottle was washed ashore and picked up by a colored man. He took it to his employer, who read the

messages inside. They were signed by Mr. Levinberg, who also put in a five-dollar bill, to insure the sending of the telegram. With the note he wrote for transmission to me was one asking the finder of the bottle to take the message to the nearest telegraph office."

"But where was the bottle picked up? Where may we expect to find our friends?" asked Blake.

"Somewhere below here, I think," said Mr. Ringold. "The message was sent from a telegraph office about a hundred miles above here. Our friends probably drifted on the flood near there. They are still in the—beyond——" and he motioned to the flooded section lying to the South.

"Then let's start!" cried Joe. "Every minute counts."

With the provisions aboard, a new supply of gasoline, and with the films Blake was taking when he went overboard safely put away in water proof cases, the rescuers once more took up their voyage.

The remainder of the day they kept on down the flooded river. Several times they came within a short distance of big pieces of debris, and collisions were narrowly averted.

The afternoon wore away and dusk settled down. It began to rain again, and it was rather

a discouraged party that looked out from the cabin of the *Clytie*.

"Worse and more of it," murmured Blake, who was at the steering wheel. "Will it ever stop?"

"Now, now! None of that C. C. stuff!" spoke Joe with a laugh. "Things will come out all right yet. It's something to have had news of our friends, when we didn't expect any."

"Yes, but think of the plight they must be in —floating down this river in some house, that may go to pieces any minute!" cried Blake. "It's terrible—for Birdie and the others. The men may be able to stand it. But the ladies——"

"Well, perhaps they are rescued by this time," said Joe, cheerfully. "That message was dated several days ago, you notice. And it must have been two or three days afloat. I have a feeling, somehow, that we'll find them all right."

"Well, I sure do hope so," spoke Blake. "Pshaw! I oughn't to be this way!" he exclaimed. "I must look on the brighter side. Perhaps they are all right, after all."

They ate supper in the enclosed cabin, for there was a cold drizzle of rain that made going outside unpleasant. No one felt much like talking, but the unexpected news had, in a measure, cheered them up.

"If they could only have given us some definite clew," spoke Mr. Ringold. "I'd do anything I could to rescue them. But it is like searching in the dark."

"And, speaking of the dark, reminds me that it will soon be dark here, and we'll have to look for some place to tie up," remarked Blake. "I think we'd better be getting over toward shore."

"And I agree with you," said Mr. Ringold.

He took the wheel, relieving Joe, who had not yet eaten. The craft was directed over toward the eastern shore, and a sharp lookout was kept for some sheltered cove where the night could be spent.

It grew darker rapidly, and the rain increased in violence..

"There's a lot of stuff coming down," observed Blake, as he stood at the wheel, beside Mr. Ringold. "More debris than we've seen in some time."

"That's right," agreed the manager. "There's an island just below us," he added. "I wonder if, by any chance, our friends could have landed on that."

"We might stop there and see," suggested Blake. "It might be a good place to spend the night."

"I'll try it, at any rate," Mr. Ringold said.

The island, now that the waters had risen on all sides of it, was rather small.

The motor boat was steered along the Western shore of it, but a nearer view showed that there could, by no possibility, be any one on it. For it was long and narrow, and a view could be had entirely across it.

"I guess we won't stop—there's no one there," the manager said, as he veered the boat away.

"No—there's no sign of them," agreed Blake.

They were approaching the foot of the island —that is, the down stream end, and, as the motor boat shot past it, carried by the powerful current, and her propeller, Blake uttered a cry of alarm.

"Look out for that raft!" he yelled.

Mr. Ringold looked in time to see a big lumber raft, unmanned and uncontrolled, coming down on the other side of the island. It turned the lower end just as the motor did, and before those on board the craft could do anything to avoid the danger, the raft had collided with them, striking the *Clytie* on the starboard bow with a resounding crash.

The boat heeled over, and seemed about to capsize.

CHAPTER XX

ON THE RAFT

"We're sinking!"

"Get out the life preservers!"

"Save the films and cameras!"

"And grab something to eat! Don't forget that!"

Thus cried those aboard the *Clytie,* for it was evident that the stanch craft had made her last voyage. She was careened at a dangerous angle, and her motor had stopped.

"The raft ripped a big hole in the bow!" shouted Mr. Ringold, who, with Blake, had been thrown against the side of the pilot house, and was somewhat stunned by the shock.

"Are we sinking?" asked Joe.

"No, but it is only a question of a few minutes. We must save ourselves."

"And our outfit—if we can," said Joe. "What shall we do?"

A hasty examination showed that the jagged

front logs of the raft had been driven completely into the motor boat, staving in her planking, through which the water was rushing. And, so violent had been the blow of the collision that the *Clytie* was actually impaled on the floating tree trunks, that were bound together with ropes.

"Take to the raft!" cried Mr. Ringold. "It's our only chance!"

"That's right!" shouted C. C. "Come on, boys! Load all we can on the raft!"

The water was now up over the cabin floor. It was evident that she was going down fast. Only the fact that the raft stuck part way through her held her up. Once filled with water, as she soon must be, she would pull herself loose by her own weight, and go to the bottom of the Mississippi.

"Food first, water—and something for a light!" cried Mr. Ringold, issuing his orders calmly. "Then, if you can, boys, save the cameras and films."

"Oh, we'll save them!" exclaimed Blake.

"I should say so!" murmured Joe.

A keg of water, some packages of food, and two lanterns were hastily lifted over the side of the motor boat, and placed on the raft. Then some blankets, bedding and other things were tossed over in a pile.

"Now the cameras and films!" yelled Blake. "Get on the raft, Joe, and I'll pass them to you."

Stopping only to gather up a few personal belongings, Joe leaped to the surface of the raft. It had been a large one, though only part of it remained now, and it was well up out of the water.

"Here you go!" cried Blake, as he handed down the reels of exposed film. And how glad Blake was that they had taken the precaution to wrap them in oil-cloth! For it was raining, and he had to lay the reels down on the raft, where the water would drizzle on them.

"Any more?" asked Joe, as he came back from the center of the log raft, where he had piled the things Blake handed to him out of the motor boat.

"The cameras now. They're loaded, so be careful of them. We may get a chance to take more views," spoke Blake, hopefully.

"It doesn't seem so," commented Joe, as he glanced at the sinking *Clytie*.

Mr. Ringold and C. C. were busy saving what they could to give aid and comfort while aboard the raft. It could not be much, for there was little time to spare.

"She's going!" warned the actor, as he passed out another roll of blankets and bedding.

"I think she is," agreed the manager, as the

impaled motor boat gave a lurch, and pulled partly away from the raft. She was filling rapidly with water, and the great weight of that, as well as the weight of the motor, was dragging down the hapless *Clytie*.

"Come on! Jump!" urged the actor to Mr. Ringold and Blake, who were aboard the sinking boat. "No time to lose."

Blake paused only long enough to grab up a light rifle, and some cartridges, which were in the cabin, and then he leaped to the raft.

He was followed by Mr. Ringold, and none too soon, for, a moment later, with a rending of planks, the motor boat pulled away from the jagged ends of the raft on which she was impaled.

A second's hesitation, and she sank with a gurgling, bubbling sound beneath the muddy, swirling waters of the Mississippi.

"Good-bye, *Clytie!*" said Blake, softly, and it was as though he was saying farewell to some dear friend.

"Well, I guess we've seen the last of her," murmured Mr. Ringold.

They stood silent for a minute, huddled together, a wet, miserable group on the big raft that was racing down stream. Then, as he gazed at his companions, and then at the pile of their possessions, C. C. Piper remarked:

"What happened, anyhow? What does it all mean? Is it a dream or reality?"

"It's real, all right," spoke Joe, mournfully enough. "We were rammed by this raft—that's what happened. And it's lucky for us that these logs stood by long enough for us to get aboard, or we'd be swimming out there in the big muddy," and he nodded toward the river, from which they were kept by none too stout a craft.

"It's my fault," said Mr. Ringold. "I should have seen this raft racing along."

"Well, let's see what sort of a boat the raft's going to make for us," interrupted Joe. "We've got to stay aboard to-night, at all events."

"Yes, and maybe longer," added Blake. "Well, there's a cabin to take shelter in, anyhow. Let's take a look at that."

He nodded toward the stern of the raft, and, looming up in the darkness, could be seen a sort of shack, or shanty. It was where the raftmen did their cooking, eating and sleeping, while navigating the big collection of logs down the river.

"Let's see what sort of place it is," Blake went on. "Maybe there are bunks in it, and a stove where we can cook what stuff we've got left," and he looked at the little pile of food they had been able to save from the sinking boat.

CHAPTER XXI

ADRIFT AGAIN

"Not so bad."

"That's right! It might be a whole lot worse."

"It's rough, but we can stand it."

"We've got to. There's no going ashore while this flood keeps up."

Thus, in turn, Blake, Joe, Mr. Ringold and C. C. commented, as they stood in the doorway of the slab shack erected on the stern of the lumber raft. Blake had lighted the lantern he had taken the precaution to save from the sinking motor boat, and this gave light enough to see the interior of the cabin that must be their abiding place, for how long they could not tell.

"Well, there's a place where we can stretch out, anyhow," said Blake, after a pause.

"And a stove to cook on, and plenty of wood for fires," added Joe, as he looked down at the raft. "It won't be so bad, after all."

The slab cabin was a roomy one, made to accommodate at least half a dozen men, for there were that many bunks. There were rude chairs, a couple of tables, and some cooking utensils and dishes. Evidently the crew that had been bringing the raft down stream had counted on being aboard for some time.

"They must have gone off in a hurry," commented Mr. Ringold, for some of the chairs were overturned, and there were the remains of a meal, partially consumed, on the table. Articles of clothing were scattered about, and the bed coverings were tossed back on some of the bunks, as though the sleepers had hurried out, without waiting to stop and gather up their belongings.

"There must have been some sort of accident to the raft," observed Mr. Piper. "Probably it was suddenly caught in the rising flood, and maybe it collided with a boat, or another raft. Part of it was carried away, that's evident from the jagged end that hit us. And I reckon the men fairly jumped overboard, leaving everything here just as we see it."

"That's probably the explanation," agreed the manager. "Well, let's get our things in out of the rain, and see what we can do."

It was showering heavily now, and the boys were more glad than ever that they had taken

the precaution of wrapping the films in waterproof coverings.

Some other lanterns were found in the cabin, and, being filled with oil, they were lighted and hung up on the walls.

"We ought to show a light outside, too, I suppose," said Blake, reflectively.

"That's so, to avoid being run down by a passing steamer," said Mr. Ringold, "though I don't believe many vessels will take a chance of navigating the river when it's in this condition. Still, it's best to be on the safe side."

There was a pole about amidships of the raft, evidently intended to be used for displaying a light, and a lantern was put as high on this as possible.

By this time our friends had brought into the cabin the things they had so hastily removed from the motor boat, and then they sat down to consider matters, and decide on some course of procedure.

"First of all," began Mr. Piper, "we must——"

"Have something to eat!" interrupted Blake. "There's dry wood in here, and a stove. I see a coffee pot, and I know we brought some ground coffee—not much, but some. Where's that keg of fresh water?"

"Here," replied Joe, who had brought it in. "It won't go very far, though."

Indeed the water supply was going to be a serious matter, though, if worse came to worst, they could use the river water, by allowing it to stand for some hours, to settle. It was fresh, but full of mud, and unpleasant to taste and smell. They could also catch the rain as it fell.

"I saw a barrel outside the shack," spoke Mr. Ringold. "Maybe that has water in it."

"I'll look!" offered Blake. "It has!" he cried a moment later, "and it's fresh water, too. That will last us some days."

"Then go ahead, and make coffee," suggested Joe, "and we'll see what else there is here."

An inspection of the cabin showed that there was some food left. It was not very choice, but it was better than nothing, consisting of canned stuff, and, with what our friends had managed to take off their sinking boat, would do for a while.

A fire was soon crackling in the rather dilapidated stove, and the odor of coffee, fragrant and appetizing, filled the air.

"Well, this isn't so bad," remarked Blake, as he sat munching a canned corned beef sandwich. "We're pretty snug in here."

"Yes, and we don't have to worry about run-

ning a motor, or sinking," added Joe. "We can't sink. I really like this better than the *Clytie,* after all."

"You might—if you say it quick!" spoke Blake, half-sarcastically. "Still we're a good deal better off here than out there," and he nodded toward the river.

"But the question is: What's going to become of us?" asked C. C. "We can't stay here for ever."

"Nobody wants to," said Blake. "But we've got to—for a while; until we're taken off, anyhow. We certainly can't swim to shore. We're about in the middle of the river now, and this is several miles wide. We've got to make the best of it."

"We can't do anything but let her drift," said Mr. Ringold. "The sweep, or steering oar, is gone, though we might manage to rig up another. We'll try in the morning."

The meal, rude as it was, revived them all, and cheered their drooping spirits. They discussed the matter, and decided there was little use in keeping a watch during the night. They had just to float on.

"Well, it's good and dry in here, anyhow," observed Blake, as he crawled into one of the bunks.

"Yes, that's another comfort, and we've got more room than we had aboard the *Clytie*," said Joe.

"Don't go to making fun of the old craft," cautioned his chum. "She served us well. I'm sorry she's gone."

They went to sleep with the rain pattering on the roof of the cabin, thankful for the raft, in spite of the havoc it had made in their plans.

A dreary, drizzling day succeeded. They made themselves as comfortable as they could in the cabin, and went carefully over their food supplies.

"Enough for two days, anyhow," said Mr. Ringold. "After that, well——"

He shrugged his shoulders, and did not finish. But they all knew what he meant.

They were in the middle of a wide and desolate stretch of the Mississippi. In the far distance, as they rushed along with the swift current, they could see small towns and villages. They could not, however, reach them, for they could not steer the raft. They tried to make a long sweep, such as the lumbermen use, but they had no pole long enough, and no tools with which to cut one out of the lumber at their disposal.

Joe and Blake did, indeed, try to construct a pole out of one of the loose slabs on the side of

the shack, by splitting it with a small axe. But the result was only a weak, wobbly staff, that broke the first time it was used.

"We've just got to drift on—until something happens," said Mr. Ringold.

Joe examined their cameras, for they had two, and also the developed and undeveloped films. The latter were safe in the water-tight cases. In the afternoon, when it cleared a little, Joe and Blake took more moving pictures from the front end of the raft.

They saw no craft of any kind. They seemed alone on the waste of waters.

Night came, and they floated on. They ate less now, for they wanted to make their food supply last as long as possible. But the victuals seemed to go alarmingly fast.

"Maybe we'll drift ashore to-morrow," said Mr. Ringold, hopefully. "If we do we'll leave the raft, and walk until we get to some place where we can hire a boat. For, now that we are reasonably certain that our friends are somewhere down the river, we must make every effort to find them."

It was about midnight when they were all awakened by a severe shock.

"What's that?" cried Mr. Ringold, leaping from his bunk.

"We hit something!" cried Joe.

"I should say we did!" yelled Blake. "We're ashore, that's what we are. We're not moving!"

The raft was not moving, save for a slight undulating motion, due to one end being afloat, and the other on land; at least so they supposed.

Taking one of the lanterns, Blake went outside. There was no rain, and a pale moon, behind some watery clouds, gave a little light.

"What is it?" Joe wanted to know.

"We've run into an island—or an island has run into us," Blake answered.

"An island!" echoed Mr. Ringold. "I was hoping it was the mainland."

"No such good luck," went on Blake.

They joined him "on deck," if one may use such a term concerning a raft. Looking forward they saw that the front, and jagged, end of the raft—the same that had rammed and sunk the *Clytie*—had struck on a small island, and was wedged fast in the bank.

They did not sleep much more that night. In the morning, an examination showed that it would be out of the question to remain on the island, and leave the raft. The spot of land, in the midst of the flood, was too small. Probably when the river was at its ordinary height the island was considerably larger. It proved of one

advantage to our friends, however, for there was a spring in the middle of it, where the ground was higher, and this gave them a supply of fresh water.

"I wonder if we couldn't work the raft off?" mused Blake, when they had eaten a very light lunch, for their food was now very low.

But the raft was too heavy, and too firmly imbedded in the soft mud of the island, to enable our friends, try as they might, to float it. They toiled and tugged all the afternoon, for they felt the almost vital necessity of getting away, and reaching a place where they could get more food.

"I guess we're stuck—and stuck fast!" said Blake, wearily. Then it began to rain again, and they retired to the cabin and went to bed, though no one slept much.

It was about ten o'clock when Joe, getting up for a drink, felt the raft suddenly move.

"Something's happening!" he cried.

At once they were all aroused. The affair of logs trembled and shivered. Then, with a rending, splintering sound she floated free of the island.

"We're afloat again!" cried Joe. "The river must have risen and pulled us free."

CHAPTER XXII

ON A BIG ISLAND

"SAY, we're having luck, all right!" exclaimed Blake, when it was made certain that they were adrift again. "I thought we'd be stuck on that island for days."

"So did I," returned Joe. "Yes, we've had luck, of a certain kind, but it isn't going to feed us," and he looked at the shelves of that part of the cabin called the "pantry." The shelves were empty of all save one small tin of corned beef, and a box of crackers. That, with coffee, must be their breakfast.

It seemed as though that night would never pass. Slowly it wore on, and, through the storm and darkness, through the rising water, floated the raft, bearing the rescue party onward. It was scarcely a rescue party any longer, however, being more in need of rescue itself.

But, desperate as their plight was, our friends had not given up hope of finding and saving the

missing theatrical company. The chance and hope were slim indeed, but Blake, Joe and the two men were not of the sort that give up easily.

"Conditions must be fierce all along the river, the way the water keeps on rising," said Blake, when the first faint streaks of dawn showed in the gray, leaden-colored sky.

"I should say so!" agreed Joe. "The river must have gone up almost a foot in the night, to lift us off the island. It took considerable power to pull the logs out of the mud where they were stuck."

"I think the raft broke, and twisted away from the front logs," was Blake's opinion, and this, later, was found to be so. So firmly imbedded in the mud had been the jagged and sharp ends of the logs, that they had remained there. But the stern of the raft, rising, had broken the fastenings, and a section of it had been left on the island.

"All hands to breakfast!" called Mr. Piper, a little later. "And curb your appetites," he added, grimly, as he pointed to the crackers and corned beef on the rough table. "Don't ask for more than one helping of pie, only one slice of white turkey meat to a customer, and no gravy. What do you expect, anyhow?"

They made as merry as they could over the

frugal repast, but it was really no joke. Fortunately the coffee held out, and they knew they could live on that for some time.

"If we could only work the raft to shore, or signal for help to some steamer, we'd be all right," complained C. C. "But we can't do it."

The great flood had caused an almost complete cessation of river navigation, at least in the stretches where they now were. They had seen no craft of any kind since being obliged to take to the raft, and the river was so wide that they could not communicate with towns on shore. They passed several small hamlets that were deserted, for the water was up to the second stories of the houses. The inhabitants had fled back to higher ground.

"Well, we've got to do something," said Blake, when noon came, and the pangs of hunger were felt. "I wonder if we couldn't build a signal fire, or raise a flag of distress, or something like that. It might bring help."

"We could try," agreed Joe. "Let's hoist a blanket up on the lantern pole, and make a smudge fire. It'll be safe, for there's so much water around us that we can put it out easily enough. It might do some good."

A ragged blanket was nailed up as high on the pole, amidships, as they could reach, by

standing on some boxes. Then preparations for making a smudge fire, or one that smoked, rather than blazed, went on.

"Make it up forward," suggested Mr. Ringold. "And take a piece of the stove grate from the oven to keep the blaze up from the logs. They're green, but they might burn through, and cause trouble."

Blake went forward to look for a good place to make the fire, which would be fed with damp wood, to cause more smoke. Joe was preparing some splinters and light kindling, from packing boxes, to start it.

"Say, but I am hungry!" murmured Joe, as he looked for matches.

"So am I!" echoed his chum. "But I guess we'll have to take it out in—coffee."

The fire was made, and a dense cloud of smoke arose.

"They ought to see that from shore, if it is two or three miles away," remarked C. C.

"If they'll only come out to investigate, and take us off," spoke the manager. "Those who see it may think it is only a pile of rubbish on fire."

"Well, we've done all we can," said Blake, despondently.

A spirit of gloom seemed to have settled down over them all. Probably the lack of food caused it, though their plight was bad enough without that being added to it.

Late in the afternoon, Blake, going forward to put some more wet wood on the smouldering blaze, came hurrying back with a strange look on his face.

"Say!" he cried to Joe, who was making a pot of coffee, "there is some kind of an animal on the front end of this raft."

"Animal?" repeated Joe, wonderingly. "What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I say. There is some animal up forward there under that pile of boxes," for some empty packing cases were stacked up front, evidently placed there by the lumbermen to use, later, for fuel in the stove.

"You must be dreaming," spoke Joe.

"I am not! Come and see!" invited Blake, and, slipping into the cabin, he came out with the small rifle he had taken from the motor boat.

"What are you going to do?" asked Joe.

"Shoot it, if I get the chance," replied his chum, in determined tones.

Together the moving picture boys advanced cautiously.

"How did you happen to see it?" asked Joe, as they approached the pile of boxes.

"Why, it ran out just as I stooped over to put some wood on the fire. Then, when it saw me, it ran back again."

"What was it? How big was it?" Joe wanted to know.

"Well, it was pretty big," said Blake, "and it looked like a muskrat, as much as anything."

"Maybe it was a muskrat," Joe suggested. "There must be a lot of 'em in this river, especially since they've been driven out of their homes by the high water."

"Are muskrats good to eat?" asked Blake.

"Why, yes, I've heard of people eating them," Joe replied, doubtfully. "Why do you ask?"

"Because we might have to eat 'em," Blake went on, with a grim look coming over his face. "I'm not going to starve."

"It isn't much fun," admitted Joe.

"You go over there, and tear down the pile of boxes," suggested Blake, "and I'll stand ready to pop at it when the beast comes out."

"All right," assented Joe.

One by one he took away the empty boxes, tossing them aside. He was soon down near the bottom of the pile.

"There doesn't seem to be anything here," he said.

"Oh, it's in there, all right," spoke Blake, confidently.

Hardly had the words left his lips than there was a scurry in one of the boxes, and a big, grayish animal ran out.

"There he goes!" cried Joe. "Pop him over! Get him!"

Blake did not answer, but he threw the rifle to his shoulder, took a quick aim, and pulled the trigger.

There was a sharp report, a little squeal, and then the animal, which had run out to seek new shelter, curled up near the edge of the raft—dead.

"There's your muskrat," said Blake, calmly. "Now let's eat him. We can't be squeamish."

"Muskrat? That's no muskrat!" yelled C. C. Piper, as he came running up to inquire the cause of the shot.

"What is it, then?" asked Blake.

"It's a 'possum, and a fine fat one, too!"

"Opossum!" repeated Blake. "Is it good to eat? That's what interests me now, more than what sort of an animal it is."

"Good to eat! I should say so!" cried the

moving picture actor. "They're fine, baked with sweet potatoes."

"Well, we'll have to get along without the sweet potatoes, boys," remarked Mr. Ringold, laughingly. "But it's lucky you got him, Blake. Opossum is good eating."

Blake and Joe looked a bit doubtful, but, when the animal was served, they ate with a zest that comes from a good appetite.

"It must have jumped on the raft the time we were stuck on the island," said Joe. "And it's lucky for us that it did."

The opossum, so providentially obtained, served to put them over that day and part of the next.

It was nearly noon, and the last of the opossum meat had been served, and the last of the coffee made. Blake and Joe went down to the pile of boxes, to lift them about again.

"We might find another 'possum," remarked Blake, and he took the rifle with him. But, to their regret, there were no more aboard.

"I'd be glad to see even a muskrat," spoke Joe. But none of those animals, which are greatly relished by some persons, was on the raft.

"If we only had our fishing tackle, we might try our luck in the river," suggested C. C.

"I guess we could rig up something," said Blake.

There was no need to do this, as they found some lines and hooks in the cabin. They used some of the opossum skin for bait, but either the river was too high, or the bait was not tempting enough, for they got no bites.

Late that afternoon the raft swung around a bend in the river, and at once there appeared, just below, a large island.

"We're heading right for it!" yelled Blake. "We'd better try to steer to one side."

But to do this was out of the question. They had no method of steering their unwieldly craft.

On they rushed, straight for the island, which was of large extent. It was quite high, and well wooded.

"I guess we've got to land there whether we want to or not," cried Mr. Ringold.

Hardly had he spoken, when the raft crashed into the island. The forward logs were piled up brokenly on the shore, and a creaking, splintering sound gave warning that the raft was going to pieces.

"She's breaking up!" yelled Blake.

"Save what stuff you can!" shouted Joe. "The cameras and films!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LOST ONES

THE raft, pushed hard against the end of the island by the power of the river current, buckled. The middle part rose up in the shape of the inverted letter V. The logs tore from their fastenings of ropes and chains, and broke and splintered one against the other.

"Come on!" yelled Blake. "Save what we can!"

He and the others rushed into the cabin, where their things had been stored. There was no food to be saved, and no time to roll off the water barrel. They would have to take their chances of finding a spring on the island, or drink the river water.

"The cameras! The films!" cried Joe, again. "Save them!"

He and his chum gave their attention to these. With them in their arms they rushed, as best they could, over the raft toward land. Mr. Piper and the manager looked after the clothing and bedding.

By this time the raft had swung around, broadside to the island, bringing the cabin that much nearer the shore. This made it more easy to save what few belongings they could take with them.

Back and forth they ran from the raft to the island. The cameras and the films were put in a safe place, and then the two moving picture boys helped in removing the other belongings.

Some clothing, some bedding, an axe, the rifle, and a few other things were all they had time to save. Then, with a splintering of timbers, a cracking of chains and a parting of ropes, the raft divided into two parts, one being swept down one side of the island, and the other portion down the opposite shore.

Blake, Joe and the two men stood beside their little heap of belongings, looking at one another with solemn faces.

For a moment no one spoke. They looked at the logs, rushing on down the river, and then Blake said:

"Well, things haven't stopped happening yet."

"I should say not!" cried Joe. "This is worse and more of it. What next?"

"No telling," said C. C., gloomily. "We'll probably starve here."

"Oh, I hope not!" said Mr. Ringold, with

assumed cheerfulness. "There's probably a restaurant around the corner. We'll go there and have some roast chicken. Don't all speak at once."

To the credit of Mr. Piper be it said that he laughed. His gloomy periods seemed to be leaving him.

"Well, let's see where we're at," suggested Mr. Ringold. "What have we here?"

"Nothing to eat; that's certain," remarked Joe. "And I could take in a whole——"

"Don't you dare say porterhouse steak!" interrupted Blake. "That would be adding insult to injury."

"All right; then I won't," agreed Joe.

"It's coming on night," spoke Mr. Ringold. "If we can't have supper we must, at least, provide some sort of shelter. We have some blankets, and we can cut down poles, and make a tent. It looks as though it was going to rain again."

"It sure does," agreed Blake. "We've got to have some sort of shelter."

"To say nothing of something to eat," added Joe, in a low voice.

"Eat! I'd give a good bit, just for a muskrat sandwich!" said Blake.

Tired and discouraged, but still not giving up

all hope, our friends set to work to make a rude tent. By the use of blankets and poles they made one, well up from the water.

Fortunately the island was of high, sloping formation, and, knowing that the river might rise suddenly, they went far enough away from the edge, to preclude any possibility of being overwhelmed in the night.

"This must be a big island," observed Joe, as he and Blake worked together. "When the water is at the regular level it must be some miles across."

"I guess it is," agreed his chum.

Penetrating into the woods, in search of more tent poles, Blake uttered a cry of surprise.

"What's the matter?" shouted Joe. "Have you found anything?"

"I should say I had!" answered Blake, as he came rushing out with a square tin box in his arms. "Look here! Pilot biscuit—a whole tin of it, and only a little of it is wet! This will keep us alive for a while, anyhow."

"Where in the world did you find it?" asked Joe.

"Back there, by that big tree. It must have been washed down here by the flood."

"I don't care how it got here," cried Joe, "give me some."

Mr. Ringold and Mr. Piper came up on the run to view the find. As Blake had said, it was a large tin of pilot biscuit, and only a little water had come in, thanks to the waxed paper covering.

"Say, if we only had the clam chowder that goes with these crackers, wouldn't it be great!" mumbled Joe, as he took another pilot biscuit.

"Quit it!" begged Blake.

For, be it known, pilot biscuit are large, hard, round crackers, made on purpose for serving with clam chowder, with which they make a most excellent combination.

As they sat there in the dusk, making a meal off these crackers, and drinking water (a spring having been found) Mr. Piper asked:

"Where did you say you found these, Blake?"

"Right up there, on that little knoll, by the big tree."

"And how did you say you thought they got there?"

"Why, I suppose the flood must have carried away a country store, and washed the box up there."

"Did you see any other stuff washed up there —anything other than debris, or anything else in the eating line?"

"Not a thing—I wish I had."

"Well," remarked Mr. Piper, "I don't wish

to raise false hopes, or anything like that, but I should say that this tin of pilot biscuit was dropped, or left, up there by someone who has been on, or who is still on, this island!"

"You mean—people?" cried Blake, leaping to his feet in surprise.

"That's what I mean. Why, this box of crackers never was washed up there by the flood—the water didn't come high enough. That box was dropped there by someone who took refuge on this island."

For a moment no one spoke, after C. C.'s announcement. Then Mr. Ringold remarked:

"I believe you're right!"

"Of course I'm right," declared the actor. "Why, it stands to reason that the box of biscuit was never washed up here. The flood hasn't got that high yet."

"And do you think whoever dropped it is still here?" asked Joe.

"That's more than I can say," went on Mr. Piper. "They may have been here a short time, and gone off again. Pilot biscuit is often carried on boats, for it keeps well, and is always good eating. Some boating party may have been here before the flood, having a picnic, as it were."

"Don't talk of picnics!" begged Blake. "It makes me think of good things to eat."

"Well, aren't you eating?" Joe wanted to know, with a grim smile.

"It's better than nothing," admitted Blake, as he took another cracker.

Our friends passed a wretched night. If you have ever tried to sleep in a leaky tent, in the rain, having had nothing worth while to eat, and, at the same time, anxious about your safety, you can, perhaps, imagine what Blake, Joe and the others suffered. They slept in fitful dozes, in spite of their wretchedness, and how they welcomed the morning light, raining though it was!

"First call for breakfast!" shouted Joe, as he brought out the tin of biscuits. "Regular prison fare—bread and water," he commented, with a laugh.

"Well, it's better than nothing," declared Mr. Piper, and the others rejoiced that, in this time of adversity, he could be so cheerful.

Leaving the cameras and films under cover of the tent and some blankets, as well as in the water-proof coverings, the party set off on a tour of exploration.

"We'll see if there are any persons on this island," said Mr. Ringold.

Through the rain they started off. It was not easy going, and they were weak from lack of proper food.

But, doggedly, they kept on. There was a hill in about the centre of the island, a hill that would seem to give a good view of the surrounding land.

Blake reached the summit first. He looked about him, and then gazed, steadfastly and earnestly, into a little glade that was below him.

"See anything?" asked Joe, as he panted up after his chum.

"I don't know—I—I——" and Blake's voice trembled. "Are those tents down there, Joe, or—or is it only mist?"

"They're tents all right, old man! Big tents, too! Say, there are people here!" he fairly shouted.

"Come on!" cried Blake, starting down the slope.

They fairly ran down the hill. A little way from the tents the party of refugees came to a halt. Blake rubbed his eyes, as though to brush away clinging cobwebs. He stared at a girl who came from one of the tents.

"Birdie Lee!" he gasped.

"Blake Stewart!" came the surprised answer. "You here!"

And the two stared wonderingly at each other.

CHAPTER XXIV

RISING WATERS

OTHERS came running out of the tents—Mr. Robertson, Mr. Levinberg, Miss Shay—several other actors and actresses, and also the moving picture operators.

"Look—look!" cried Birdie, pointing to Blake. "Is it Blake, or am I dreaming?"

No one answered her for a moment. They were all too surprised. Then, looking back up the hill, the company of players saw Joe, Mr. Ringold and C. C. Piper.

"How did you get here?"

"Where did you come from?"

"Were you looking for us?"

These were some of the questions rapidly fired back and forth.

"Say!" cried Blake, at length. "Have you anything to eat? We're most starved—nothing but some pilot biscuits that we found in a tin."

"There!" cried Birdie Lee. "I knew we left those biscuits behind. We must have dropped them when we moved our camp. And I did so want them with the canned clam chowder."

"Clam chowder!" cried Joe. "Say, where is it? I'll eat the can itself!"

"But where did you come from? How did you get here?" asked Mr. Levinberg.

"Let's feed them first, and have explanations afterward," suggested Birdie Lee, as she clasped a hand each, of Blake and Joe. "Oh, we are so glad to see you!" she cried, impulsively.

"Just a word of explanation!" begged Mr. Ringold. "I can't understand this. How did you folks get here? We've been looking for you all along the river."

"We hoped somebody would come for us," said Miss Shay. "Have you a boat so you can take us to shore?"

"A boat? No!" cried Blake. "Our motor boat was hit by a raft and sunk, and then the raft hit this island and went to pieces. We're stranded. Haven't you folks a boat?"

"Not a boat," said Mr. Robertson, with a shake of his head. "We're marooned on the island."

"Come on! I'm sure they must be starved!" laughed Birdie Lee. "Feed them first, and talk

afterward. At least we have plenty of food."

And, when the moving picture boys and their companions had made a hasty meal, explanations were made.

"We were caught in the flood, when we went to that first island," said Mr. Levinberg, "and carried down the river in our boat."

"And we thought surely we would be drowned," put in Miss Shay.

"But we weren't," resumed the chief actor. "Fortunately our boat was a large one, and we had plenty of food and supplies. We went out equipped for a long stay, you know, with tents that were to be used in some of the island scenes, and many other things. We had time to put most of these aboard the boat, before the flood came.

"Then we tried to get back to Hannibal, but the current was too much for us. So we decided to come on down, and trust to luck. But luck was against us, for our rudder broke, and we could not ship a new one. So we were carried on down, utterly unable to guide our boat.

"We tried to signal for help, but we were carried too far out to allow our signals or cries to be heard by persons in the towns we passed. Anyhow, I guess they had their own troubles.

We met no other steamers, and all we could do was to come on with the flood.

"Finally we swashed into a house, and, house, boat and all, we landed on this island, and we've been here ever since," concluded the actor. "We've been hoping against hope that someone would come to our relief, for, though we still have considerable food, it will not last forever."

"But where is the boat in which you came here?" asked Mr. Ringold. "Can't you repair the rudder and use it."

"We haven't the boat now," said Birdie. "The high water carried it away one night, and the house too, though we saved some stuff from it."

"That's right," said Mr. Levinberg, "our boat slipped her cable, and went on down stream. Luckily we had all our supplies out of her.

"We landed at the end of the island where you struck," the actor went on. "We made a camp there, and then moved up here."

"And that's how we left behind the tin of pilot biscuit for clam chowder," said Birdie.

More and detailed explanations of the experiences of the two parties were exchanged, and then preparations were made for housing the four newcomers for the night. There was an-

other tent that could be put up—one of several taken along to be used in the picture films—and with their own bedding our friends were made fairly comfortable.

"Say, but it seems good to eat once more!" remarked Joe, at supper that night. "Nothing but crackers and water—whew!"

"And 'possum!" added Blake, and he told of shooting that animal.

A fairly complete camping outfit had been brought along and saved by the picture players, and this did good service now. Of course the food was all of the canned variety, but even that was welcome in the emergency.

The day after the two parties were united proved bright and sunny, and Joe and Blake took a number of pictures of the players and the flood.

"But the river is still rising," reported Mr. Ringold, with a worried look, as he came back from a trip to the shore of the island. "If it covers this place——"

"Where will we be?" asked Mr. Piper.

No one answered him.

And that the water might rise even high enough to completely cover the island seemed very possible, for, in spite of the brightness of the morning, it rained hard in the afternoon.

Inch by inch the waters rose. Faster and madder they swirled past the island on either side. Gradually the area of land grew smaller and smaller.

"We shall have to move the tents," said Mr. Ringold, on the second day. "We must go to the highest point possible."

It was hard work shifting camp in the rain, but it had to be done. Finally the white canvas houses were set up on the top of the knoll whence Blake had looked down to see their friends whom they sought.

And still the rain came down, and still the waters rose.

"Another day, at this rate, and it will be all over—except the swimming," said C. C., grimly.

"Can't we make a raft?" asked Blake. "We have an axe, and there are trees to be cut down."

"Good!" cried Mr. Ringold. "We should have thought of that before. We'll build a raft! On that we may float to safety."

CHAPTER XXV

THE GOVERNMENT BOAT

But building a raft was not an easy matter. True, the trees could be cut down, but our friends were not skillful woodsmen, and there was nothing with which to bind the logs together. There were some tent ropes, but they were needed to keep up the canvas shelters as long as possible.

"We'll do the best we can, though," decided Mr. Ringold, as he and the men and boys labored at the raft.

They hastened with the work, for the water crept higher and higher. By using tough withes, and wild grapevines, they managed to bind the logs fairly well, but, at best, the raft was a very frail affair.

"I'll never trust myself on that!" declared Miss Shay, shuddering.

"I don't much fancy it myself," admitted Mr. Piper.

"But it will be better than staying here and getting—well, getting your feet wet," spoke Blake. He was going to say "drowned," but changed his mind.

Higher and higher came the water. There was now only a space of not more than a hundred feet square, to which the refugees had retreated as an area of safety. The raft floated in the water, moored by a long rope of twisted grapevine, and ready for our friends to embark on it.

Packages of food were made ready to be taken along, and also a keg of fresh water. The water supply troubled them, as the spring was now covered by the flood, and all they had was some which they had stored for just that emergency.

"We'll take along the tents," said Mr. Ringold. "They'll come in useful, as shelter on the raft."

"And we'll have to take to the raft in the morning, I think," Mr. Piper said. "At the rate the river is rising, we won't have ground under our feet much longer than that."

Gloomy, uncertain and miserable was that night. The campfire, which had hitherto been kept up, not without a great deal of work, went out in the rain, and, save for a few lanterns, there was no light. Naturally there was no heat,

and cold victuals were the portion of the refugees.

Still no one complained, even C. C. maintaining a brave front in the face of danger and privation. Everything possible was made ready for embarking on the raft in the morning. After that——

No one knew what would happen.

"I suppose we'll have to abandon everything," said Birdie Lee, talking to Joe and Blake, after "supper," if so the meal could be designated.

"Well, I'm going to stick to the films and the camera to the last!" exclaimed Blake.

"That's what!" cried Joe. "We may get to some place where we'll be able to get a few more pictures."

The night passed slowly and miserably. At the first streak of dawn Blake was astir, ready to help take down the tents and load the raft.

But, as he looked toward the place where it had been tied, he saw only the twisted end of the grapevine cable.

"The raft is gone!" he cried. "It's been carried away in the flood!"

"What's that?" called Joe, hardly believing.

"The raft is gone! And our last chance is gone with it!"

Hurriedly they all came out of the tents. It

was but too true. The rising waters had pulled and tugged at the raft, until they had carried it down stream.

There was no time to make another. Already the space on which the refugees had taken shelter was growing smaller. Inch by inch the waters rose. The pegs of one of the tents, in which supplies were kept, were now being lapped by the muddy waves.

"Oh, for a boat!" cried Blake.

"We've got to do something!" yelled Joe. "We can't stay here much longer."

That was evident to all. Yet what could be done?

"Cut down some trees!" cried Mr. Ringold. "We can use them for life preservers, and perhaps float to safety. Cut down trees!"

"This means good-bye to our films!" sighed Blake.

"If not good-bye to ourselves," echoed his chum.

There was little time left. With the one axe, and the camp hatchet, the men began chopping away at the trees on the summit of the hill, where the refugees had made their last stand against the rising waters. They could remain there but an hour longer, at most.

Blake and Joe carried their camera and water-

proof packages of exposed film, to the dryest place they could find, in one of the tents.

"We can't take any food with us, when we float down on the logs," said Mr. Piper, sadly.

No one had the heart to answer him.

They were now gathered together in a space about fifty feet across, on the very summit of the hill. Several trees grew there, and, by climbing into them, it might be possible to remain above the rising water a little longer. But would even this respite save them? It did not seem possible.

The tree trunks had been felled, and were in readiness. They would make but poor life preservers at best, but better than nothing.

Inch by inch the water rose. Birdie Lee, Miss Shay and some of the other actresses were in a group, looking at each other with tear-stained faces. It seemed the end of everything.

Suddenly, through the moisture-laden air, came a shrill whistle.

"What's that?" cried Blake.

"Sounded like a steamboat!" answered Joe.

"It *is* a steamboat!" called Birdie Lee, as she looked down the flooded river. "See! There she comes! Oh, we are saved!"

"Thank the dear Lord," echoed Miss Shay.

Pushing her way up against the powerful cur-

rent, was a big boat—a steamer—from the funnels of which belched black smoke.

"Wave something!"

"Call to them!"

"Make them hear us!"

"Show a signal!"

Thus cried the refugees, as they saw help approaching. In another instant the boys and men raised their voices in a united shout, and coats and caps were frantically waved to attract the attention of the pilot of the vessel.

"He sees us! He's coming!" cried Blake, joyfully.

"And just about in time, too," added Joe, for the water was creeping higher and higher.

With loud blasts of the whistle the pilot indicated that he had seen the signals of distress, and was coming to the rescue. In quick time a small boat was lowered, and a few minutes later the refugees were safe on board the steamer, which proved to be a government boat, sent out to aid in the rescue work.

"And we've saved our films and cameras, too!" cried Joe, for the moving picture apparatus, as well as some of the personal effects of the stranded ones, had been brought away from the summit of the island, which alone was out of water, now.

"Yes, and if we get a chance we'll use up the rest of the undeveloped film, and get more flood pictures," added Blake.

"We'll leave you at the first large town," said the captain. "I guess the flood is at its height now. It won't get much higher, and there isn't much use in me going farther up the river until I take care of the passengers I've already picked up."

Accordingly he turned back, and that afternoon our friends and several others were taken ashore. The place where they were landed was within a few miles of a good-sized town, and they found quarters there, being well looked after by the hospitable inhabitants.

"Well, we're safe, anyhow," murmured Blake.

"Yes, and no more Mississippi life for me—especially in a flood," added Joe. "I've had all I want."

But the boys were not quite done with the flood. There were two or three more days of high water, and in that time they managed to get some wonderful pictures, going out in a hired boat. Then, having no more undeveloped film, they packed up their cameras, and waited for the waters to subside.

The rains ceased, the sun came out, and the Mississippi River began to assume its normal

level. Gradually the distressing scenes of the flood disappeared.

"Well, we certainly got some great pictures," said Blake, when the last of the reels had been packed up for shipment to New York.

"That's so!" agreed his chum, "and we've got a great story to tell."

"It's been about the most exciting time we ever had, since we got into this business," went on Blake.

"Not even excepting earthquake land," laughed Joe. "I wonder if we'll ever duplicate this?"

And whether they did or not may be learned by reading the next book in this series, to be called: "The Moving Picture Boys at Panama; Or, Stirring Adventures Along the Great Canal."

And now, I believe, I have told you all there is to tell concerning the adventures of Blake and Joe in the big Mississippi River flood. With the going down of the waters all danger was passed, though the peril had been great, and the toll of lives and property heavy. But, aside from the loss of some personal belongings, and the films which the theatrical company had taken, matters were not so bad. And the loss of the dramatic films was more than balanced by the ones taken by Joe and Blake of the big inundatoin.

By a lucky chance a clew was obtained to the stolen films of the relief train, and others, taken at that time. As had been suspected, Munson, or, rather, the Pullman car porter, whom he had bribed to do so, had stolen the films. But when an attempt was made to exhibit them our friends heard about it and secured the valuable celluloid strips. This was as far as Munson's plot went.

"Well, what are you going to do now?" asked Birdie Lee, of Blake and Joe, when they were once more on their way home, away from the flooded district, that was rapidly drying up.

"I know what I'm going to do," said Blake.

"What?" asked Joe.

"I'm going back to that farm, and finish out my vacation," answered his chum.

"And I think I'll send the rest of the theatrical company along with you," said Mr. Ringold. "They are certainly entitled to a rest after what they've suffered."

And so, for a time, we will take leave of our moving picture boys and their associates, and say good-bye.

THE END

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